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Critical Ventures in
Modern French Literature

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Critical Ventures in Modern French Literature

By

Arnold Whitridge

"Dans le peu que je fais je rougirais de ne pas m'addresser à ceux qui valent mieux que moi, de ne pas chercher à les satisfaire."

—Mérimée.

New York

Charles Scribner's Sons

1924

WITHDRAWN

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Nine brief analytical essays on some greater and lesser modern French writers, among whom are included Stendhal, Banville, Marie Lénéru and Anatole France, offered as the author modestly explains in his foreword as his own individual reaction to certain French writers whom he knows and admires. Agreeably written and although not profound have the virtues of honesty and clarity.

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900 HISTORY

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Foreword

If any Frenchman of a speculative turn of mind should happen upon these Critical Ventures he will probably be mildly surprised by the table of contents. "What on earth," I hear him say to himself, "can have attracted a foreigner to Gérard de Nerval or Théodore de Banville? Or why from the great wealth of contemporary literature has he chosen Marie Lenéru and Sacha Guitry?"

I can offer no satisfactory raison d'être for this ill-assorted company. One by one they obtruded themselves upon my attention and compelled me to make them my own in the only way we can make an author our own—by writing about him. However vapid the result, the mere effort at expression involves a closer intimacy. In one sense these nine essays represent the survival of the fittest. If it seems strange that in a small collection I should find room for so many mediocrities I can only plead that a man never considers his friends mediocrities, whatever the world may

think of them. I have been attracted to some of the greater spirits in French literature, but when I came to grapple them to me they eluded my embrace. For months I labored after Victor Hugo, only to conclude regretfully that I had nothing to say that had not already been better said by others.

This confession leaves such a splendid opening for the cynical reviewer that perhaps it would be as well to anticipate the blow. In all honesty and humility I believe these essays to represent an individual point of view. The critic who undertakes to explore a literature that is not his own frequently courts disaster. Landmarks that would be familiar to the most ignorant native remain unheeded while he blunders with careless optimism through dense underbrush. And yet, when he reaches his goal and looks back on the well-trodden path he might have followed, your true adventurer will not regret the expenditure of so much needless energy. The exhilaration of finding one's own way is not to be denied. So it is with the contents of this book. The author is not ashamed to admit that each essay has cost him hours of toil—more arduous toil indeed than

the results seem to warrant—followed by brief moments of pleasure. He can only hope that the reader's experience will be as nearly as possible the exact reverse.

CRITICAL VENTURES IN MODERN FRENCH LITERATURE

STENDHAL

"I SHALL dine late," said Walter Savage Landor, "but the dining-room will be well-lighted, the guests few and select." How comforting to be so sure that, while his contemporaries persisted in ignoring him, somewhere in the future a discriminating band of readers would forever burn incense at his shrine! Contempt for popularity may be only the gesture of a poseur, or it may be, as it was with Landor, an essential part of a man's philosophy. The early nineteenth century was a great age for heroics. Cambronne's laconic remark at Waterloo, so lovingly commemorated by Victor Hugo, Byron's hurling down the gauntlet to the embattled Mrs. Grundys of the world, these are, after all, only more picturesque phases of Landor's quiet appeal to posterity. Nor was he alone among men of letters in his philosophic resignation. Charles Lamb's resolution to write

for antiquity is only a whimsical expression of the same spirit, but a more startling parallel may be found in the words of that most enigmatic of Frenchmen, Henri Beyle: "Je n'écris que pour une vingtaine de personnes que je n'ai jamais vues, mais qui me comprennent."

Landor's eclectic dinner is perhaps still to be served, but there is no question that Beyle, or Stendhal, as he preferred to call himself, has come into his own. Mr. Lytton Strachey has pointed out in an illuminating essay the extraordinary diversity of Stendhal's appeal. Taine hails him as a great psychologist, Zola recognized in him the founder of naturalistic fiction, while in more recent times M. Maurice Barrès has gathered Stendhal to his heart as the very incarnation of honor. Now the interesting note in this great chorus of eulogy is that every man who has had occasion to speak of him catches in Stendhal the reflection of his own peculiar virtue. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he symbolizes the one constant trait in the infinite variety of French letters. If Taine advocated a scientific study of history or literature, it was because the scientific approach seemed to him the most logical. For the same

reason Maurice Barrès deplores the modern tendency in France to gravitate toward Paris. It is more than stupid, it is criminally illogical, for the young Frenchman to forego the ancient and honorable "vie de province." This passion for logic, for which her neighbors across the Channel think France is sometimes willing to pay an exorbitant price, is the characteristic above all others that endears Stendhal to his countrymen. We may not think of logic as an endearing quality, but let us look at it for a moment through French eyes. Strip off its academic or philosophic trappings and it appears in the more attractive guise of sincerity. Here at last we have a touchstone whose virtue no one will deny. Once we can prove that Stendhal is sincere in all his vagaries, in his carefully deliberate profanity, in his contempt for his family and his country, we shall eventually find our way into the inner sanctum of the "chapelle Beyliste."

Stendhal was only six years old when the terrifying news reached Grenoble that the Bastille had been stormed. It was an early age to form an opinion, but he tells us in his autobiography that he immediately threw in his lot with the people. From then on, partly perhaps to spite

his father, for whom he always entertained a resolute contempt, Stendhal liked to think of himself as an ardent republican. His political theories remind us somewhat of the well-meaning curé of the ancien régime who habitually addressed his congregation as "canaille chrétienne." Stendhal was too honest to hide his hatred of the mob, though he stoutly maintained that under the name of "le peuple" he passionately desired their welfare. Politics, however, never seriously arrested his attention. An early devotion to mathematics left him with an "amour fou pour les bonnes définitions," a love which was more easily gratified by philosophy and logic than by any attempt to grapple with problems of government.

When he arrived in Paris, in 1799, Stendhal had already formulated his ambitions. Lack of money, combined with the influence of his cousin, Pierre Daru, Napoleon's chief commissary, drove him into the army, but lack of money could never make him a "beau sabreur." Thirty years later, when the Napoleonic legend was at its height, Stendhal's military reminiscences were extraordinarily vivid, but his actual soldiering was limited to little more than a year

in a regiment of dragoons. Sainte-Beuve apparently thinks that he took some part in the battle of Marengo. To use his own delightful phrase, "il assista en amateur à la bataille de Marengo," but of this Stendhal himself makes no mention. As a non-combatant he toured Europe in the wake of Napoleonic victories, rising from the rank of adjutant in the commissary department to the more or less exalted post of intendant of Brunswick. It was while he held this position that he won the Emperor's approval by raising an extra two million francs for the imperial coffers beyond the authorized levy.

Force of circumstances had made Stendhal first a cavalry officer and then a glorified quartermaster, but during all those tremendous years of the First Empire his mind was busy revolving the more permanent questions of literature and philosophy. The letters to his sister Pauline, the only member of his family for whom he had any affection since the death of his mother, contain practically no references to his campaigns. Occasionally he writes with engaging frankness about his amorous adventures, but for the most part he busies himself about her education. She must read English poetry, the recognized French

classics of the eighteenth century, and, above all, his pet philosopher, Destutt de Tracy. "I am in despair at not being able to bring you a new bonnet," he writes just before going on leave, "but I have Tracy and *Gil Blas* for you instead."

Tracy is certainly not a name to conjure with in our day, but his *Elements of Ideology* is better reading than many a bald text-book on philosophy that affects to ignore it. He was a distinguished man, Monsieur Destutt, Comte de Tracy, Member of the Institute of France and of the Philosophic Society of Philadelphia, as he proudly styles himself on the title-page. Jefferson, who had known him in Paris, was proud to undertake the translation of his commentary on Montesquieu. Napoleon invited him to accompany the expedition to Egypt and never forgave him for refusing the offer. Altogether, he was a man of some importance in his own generation, whose name was as well known among the literati of America as it was in France. But to Stendhal he was infinitely more than a man of some importance; he was the originator of the science of ideas. While Locke was the first man to attempt an explanation of the human under-

standing, as one might explain the properties of a plant or a mineral, Tracy pursued the analysis one step farther. His system of philosophy undertakes to explain the process of thinking. Building on the foundations laid by Locke and Condillac, Tracy arrived at the conclusion that thinking and feeling were practically synonymous. It seemed to him, in other words, that thought was the invariable product of sensation, and that once we had analyzed our sensations accurately, nothing could prevent our thinking clearly. Tracy's theory of sensationalism was eagerly taken up by Pierre Cabanis, a doctor and freethinker, who had first come into notice as the intimate friend and physician of Mirabeau. His *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme*, one of the most materialistic philosophies ever penned, was Stendhal's Bible. Together with Tracy's *Ideology* it constitutes the quarry from which he hewed his inspiration.

We refer, of course, not to the plot or to the characters of either of the two great novels, but to his method of telling a story. "Romans toujours manqués," says Sainte-Beuve, and at the end of the first hundred pages the newcomer to Stendhal will be more than willing to agree.

And yet there is no lack of action in his novels. Lovers climbing ladders to their mistresses' windows, prison towers where heroes languish until the jailer's daughter contrives incredible escapes, poet revolutionaries plotting battle, murder, and sudden death—Stendhal's novels are positively cumbered with the paraphernalia of romance. Why, then, do the uninitiated find them such heavy going? Because Stendhal insists on developing his story in accordance with the dictates of his favorite philosophy. The dramatic scenes are invariably scamped to make room for an analysis of the emotions that made them possible. "M'exercer," he says in his journal, "à me rappeler mes sentiments naturels, voilà l'étude qui peut me donner le talent de Shakespeare." If we sometimes catch ourselves nodding over *Rouge et Noir* and *La Chartreuse de Parme*, it is because the two heroes, Julien Sorel and Fabrice del Dongo, have inherited a craving for natural sentiments from their creator. When Stendhal is most anxious for his characters to act naturally, the story breaks down. In *Rouge et Noir*, when Julien is bent on reconciling his two mistresses, one of whom he has tried to assassinate, he becomes

utterly unconvincing. Instead of acting passionately or instinctively, he is suddenly struck with the importance of comporting himself in a logical manner. What Stendhal failed to grasp was that in certain crises no one, however rational, deliberately plans to act reasonably. Certainly it was neither logical nor natural that Julien's mistresses should drive off together in the same carriage after his execution.

Assuming for the moment that Stendhal's philosophy leads him astray whenever he allows it to supply the motive force of his novels, it is invariably effective in illuminating isolated episodes. Perhaps the Waterloo scene from *La Chartreuse de Parme* is too familiar to justify any further comment. Every critic of French literature has pointed out how in this description for the first time a battle-field made its way into a novel in plain clothes. Victor Hugo gave us Waterloo in a full-bottomed wig; Erckmann-Chatrian painted a charnel-house; but Stendhal, through the medium of Fabrice, showed us a battle as it really is, in all its bewildering complexity and inconsequence. His horse is stolen from him, he blunders into a group of staff officers and gets carried away in the full tide of

retreat, without ever knowing whether he had been in a battle at all. Here at any rate Stendhal is completely successful. For once, the logical and the natural march side by side.

In all his novels, including the unfinished sketches published posthumously, Stendhal never varies his type of hero. Octave de Malivert, in *Armance*, and Lucien Leuwen are chiselled from the same block that provided Julien and Fabrice. Bourgeois or aristocrat, they are all detestably selfish. Stendhal had had to make his own way in life, and though he was of the eighteenth century in his love of reason, he was emphatically of the new order in his worship of energy. In the romantic novel of Chateaubriand and Benjamin Constant a curious blight had fallen upon heroes. Those lackadaisical young men who found the world a miserable vale of tears reappear in Stendhal fortified with a dash of Napoleonic extract. Not for nothing had he followed the Emperor from Milan to Moscow. The crash came just too soon for him to win the coveted prefecture and the title that would have gone with it, but fifteen years' service as soldier and functionary under Napoleon had taught him that a man can make

his own career. Stendhal's heroes are at the same time hard-headed and romantic. Periodic fits of melancholy never blur their vision of the main chance.

Hero-worship, however misguided it may be, is always an attractive quality, and Stendhal's passion for Napoleon is one of his most human characteristics. If Napoleon had done nothing but open the door to Italy, he would have been eternally grateful to him. Instead of which, Napoleon had rescued him from a pettifogging life at Grenoble and started him on the lifelong "chasse au bonheur." Like the older sister who delights in tormenting the younger members of the family, but resents the slightest familiarity from an outsider, Stendhal can be caustic enough about his hero in the intimacy of his journal. After all, he is too intelligent to swallow the whole Napoleonic legend himself, though he is perfectly willing to administer it to the characters in his novels. It is refreshing, for instance, to come across his comment on propaganda, which we sometimes wrongly imagine to have been one of the noxious inventions of our own times. "Les Bulletins," he says, referring to the Emperor's communiqués, "étaient

des machines de guerre et non des pièces historiques." When he sees Napoleon's official smile he recognizes it as "le sourire de théâtre, où l'on montre les dents mais les yeux ne sourient pas." These details, however, only serve to throw into higher relief the essential greatness of the man. Quite apart from the fact that he had remade the morale of the French people Stendhal idolized Napoleon as the embodiment of energy. In his hatred of the mediocre, of anything even approaching "the divine average," Stendhal was a thoroughgoing romantic. He was pleased to style himself a republican, but his republicanism was eternally wedded to strong-arm methods and founded on nothing more substantial than contempt for an effete monarchy.

It was inevitable that Stendhal's admiration for Napoleon should occasionally interfere with his literary judgments. With his characteristic love of analysis he lays bare his emotions on meeting Lord Byron. For the author of *Lara* and *Childe Harold* he had the most profound respect, but how could he shake hands with a countryman of Sir Hudson Lowe? Luckily the meeting took place in an opera box, and before

Stendhal had had time to examine his feelings Byron was adroitly drawing him out on his experiences during the retreat from Moscow. The acquaintance begun under such favorable conditions continued until Byron left Milan. Stendhal could not resist his magnetism, but he is struck by the same quality that baffled Voltaire when he met Congreve. Like Congreve, Byron set more store on being born a gentleman than on becoming a distinguished poet. If Stendhal had been better versed in aristocratic weaknesses he would have humored him by pretending to share the poet's own belief that he wrote his verses with the careless ease of a man of quality. As it was, his estimate of Byron brings out the same combination of charm and insolence observed by so many of his contemporaries. The aura of genius was unmistakable, his talk was the best in the world, but at any moment he would become "tellement Anglais et lord," to use Stendhal's own expression, that he could never bring himself to accept his invitations to dinner.

Stendhal's observations on England and English poetry were inaccurate but very often acute. He was, as far as we know, the first Frenchman

to appreciate Shelley. Whether he ever met him or not is doubtful, but he expressed a desire to be buried next to "Monsieur Bishe-Shelley" in the Protestant cemetery at Rome. In the letters to Pauline he continually bursts into bad English, exhorting her to read his favorite authors. Like every one else in France, he passed through a tremendous phase of Sir Walter Scott, whose imitators he estimated at two hundred, but as he grew older he discarded him for the same reason that he had discarded Victor Hugo. Neither of them penetrated or even attempted to penetrate the outer skin. They were both adepts at describing a breastplate or a buff jerkin, a talent for which Stendhal grew to have increasingly less respect. Though never a realist, his active, ranging mind demanded more than the romantic novels could ever give. Scott had the further disadvantage of being a Tory and, of course, his *Life of Napoleon* was anathema to any Frenchman except a Bourbon.

The real source of Stendhal's affection for England, and it was a genuine affection as long as St. Helena was not uppermost in his mind, was Shakespeare. In the year 1822 an English company attempting to produce *Macbeth* in

Paris met with the most disastrous reception. Shouts of "à bas Shakespeare, l'adjudant de Wellington!" indicated that the failure was not entirely due to artistic shortcomings. Stendhal promptly set to work to pave the way for a more intelligent understanding of Elizabethan drama. His *Racine et Shakespeare*, published in the following year, was one of the first skirmishes in the Romantic campaign. Without pretending to be a carefully reasoned brief for Shakespeare, its pungent epigrammatic style cut through the national prejudice against anything English, so that when Kean and Macready appeared in Paris a few years later they played before respectful houses. The victory, as we all know, was never decisive. *Otello*, in Alfred de Vigny's translation, was condemned for its substitution of the plebeian pillow as an instrument of murder in place of the time-honored dagger. Even in our own day Anatole France has unequivocally maintained Racine's greater truth to nature, but Stendhal at least opened the question. His conception of Shakespeare's genius was thoroughly typical. Shakespeare was great because he knew nothing and because he surrendered himself to his sensations — in other

words, because he could be fitted into Stendhal's theory "qu'il faut sentir et non savoir."

It may be bad policy to look a gift horse in the mouth, but we cannot help feeling that his admiration for Shakespeare was marked more by enthusiasm than by intelligence. For once Stendhal happened upon the truth unconsciously. In his own novels, however passionate the scene, he always subordinated the emotions to the intellect. Apparently in his criticism of the drama he reversed the process. Shakespeare, the wild, untutored genius, was the necessary antithesis to Racine, the shallow rhetorician. If there was one quality that Stendhal disliked above all others it was rhetoric. The Alexandrine line, the very cornerstone of classical drama, was for him nothing but a "cache-sottises." Judging from his *Racine et Shakespeare*, Stendhal was a thoroughgoing disciple of Victor Hugo, but he parted company with the Romantics on this same question of rhetoric. He prided himself indeed on caring nothing for the beauties of expression. Whatever was factitious, or even ornamental, in literature, infuriated him. In the famous letter to Balzac containing the prophecy that he might

be read in 1880, he admitted patterning his style on the *Code Civil.* For a man who is pre-eminent in fiction for his treatment of passion, he is curiously lacking in purple patches. Deliberately immoral he may be, but never erotic.

The treatise on Love, one of the works most cherished by the professional Beylist, is almost impregnable to the uninitiated. It was a subject on which Stendhal's knowledge was beyond question, and "if people like that sort of thing, that is the sort of thing people will like." A much greater book, though no less analytical, is his *Vie de Henri Brulard.* Thanks to Monsieur Debraye, the librarian of Grenoble, the entire manuscript has at last been completely deciphered. An abridged, inaccurate edition was published some thirty years ago, but until M. Debraye came into the field Stendhal's handwriting may be said to have defied all comers. Now that the authoritative text is before us, we venture to predict that the *Vie de Henri Brulard* will take its place alongside of *Rouge et Noir* and the *Chartreuse de Parme*, far above the rest of Stendhal's miscellaneous writings. This autobiography, for Henri Brulard is no one but Henri Beyle, was composed during the last years

of his life, while he was serving his country as consul at Civita Vecchia.

If we would understand the meaning of that mysterious quality, Beylism, Henri Brulard is the best point of departure. It is, of course, only a point of departure, for the true Beylist can identify the sovereign essence in the most unexpected places. He can extract Beylism with equal facility from the *Life of Mozart*, the *Walks about Rome*, or the *History of Painting*. The word was coined, characteristically enough, not by his admirers but by Beyle himself. It stands primarily for two things — the worship of intellectual energy, and a passion for sincerity that becomes at times almost ferocious. Stendhal's own literary activity could hardly have been more diversified. He was at the same time a novelist, a musical and dramatic critic, and author of a history of painting and a number of glorified guide-books. Everything he wrote glows with energy and sincerity. His heroes persist in battering down prejudice, and when, as in *Rouge et Noir*, they end on the scaffold, they meet death still scoffing at the hypocritical decencies of society. Stendhal would have scorned the modern conception of history as a

series of trends and movements. History in his eyes was a succession of great men bending destiny to their will. The Girondins failed because in a time of crisis they relied on intelligence rather than force of character. Such was Stendhal's philosophy of history, and so far as the cult of energy goes it was neither very original nor very interesting. The fascination of the man lies in the other half of his character.

We have already referred to his love of sincerity, a quality which he raised to the status of religion. It remains to be shown that Stendhal's definition of sincerity was considerably more comprehensive than ours. When his mother died during his childhood he was offered the perfunctory consolation that "God had taken her." From that moment he conceived a dislike for God and for religion in general that lasted until his death. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church appealed to his sense of power, but its doctrines always antagonized him. Patriotism was another quality that excited his contempt. Doctor Johnson no doubt was joking when he described patriotism as the last refuge of a scoundrel, but Stendhal would have leaped at his definition as the very truth. His

reverence for Napoleon was not actuated by any love of country. Patriotism, even when it did not involve intellectual dishonesty, was far too bourgeois a virtue to excite his admiration. Like Byron, he never tired of reiterating his preference for Italy. Of all countries in the world, Italy was the only one that understood art or respected literature.

It would be a mistake to lay too much emphasis on Stendhal's derogatory remarks about his own country. Possibly he demobilized his intellect after the Napoleonic wars sooner than most Frenchmen, but that was because his knowledge of foreign literature and foreign points of view was more extensive. Compare his *Mémoires d'un Touriste* with any other contemporary book of travel, and Stendhal's greater cosmopolitanism is at once apparent. He can discuss Andrew Jackson, *The Edinburgh Review*, and Gothic architecture with equal gusto. With the best will in the world, intellectual curiosity cannot be kept within national limits. Stendhal was born with a passion for analysis. The fortunes of a certain lieutenant of artillery created within him an abnormal appetite for knowledge and sensation. If he was ruthless in sat-

isfying these cravings, he was at least ruthlessly honest in recording the fact to himself and to posterity. He will never be as popular abroad as he is at home, because the Frenchman thrills to what is *net* and to what is *clair* to a degree that no foreigner can understand. We envy his intellect and we respect his sincerity; but for all that, we pass by on the other side.

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SAINTE-BEUVE

Last summer a movement was set on foot in Paris to erect a statue in honor of Émile Faguet, the great critic. The Young Turks of the French literary world started the inevitable rumpus against commemorating a man so conspicuously lacking in creative ability. Faguet had written some verse, to be sure, but his most enthusiastic supporters held no particular brief for his poetry. It was the critic they delighted to honor. The *Figaro* took up the discussion, in the course of which it was vehemently maintained that during the last hundred years the only critical work of permanent value had been produced by the poets and the novelists, who had occasionally turned to criticism as a relief from their more serious labors. Just as Victor Hugo and Gautier had been the great critics of the Romantic era, so in the twentieth century *La Vie Littéraire* of Anatole France was worth all the copious industry of Émile Faguet.

Only one exception was made to this sweeping generalization, and that exception was so star-

tlingly apparent that the most determined young radical could not ignore it. Straddling the middle of the century, with his unerring commonsense exuding from every one of his forty-odd volumes, stands the massive figure of Sainte-Beuve. Rave as we will against the pernicious habit of reading books about books, we cannot escape the influence of his infallible good taste. Wherever we go in French literature Sainte-Beuve has been there before us, clearing the underbrush, blazing the trails, and cutting the vistas; so much so indeed that the modern traveller begins to feel that his cumbersome equipment of scientific research might well have been left behind.

What sort of a man was this Sainte-Beuve and how came he by his uncanny knack of sympathy? For it is his sympathy even more than his vast store of knowledge that endears him to us. A man may love anybody and everybody, as Walt Whitman did, but true understanding delves deeper under the surface than the most sincere humanitarianism. With the best will in the world, no man can understand all of the people all the time. He may set aside his intelligence and issue a blanket order of philanthropy,

or he may do as Sainte-Beuve and, by taxing all his faculties to the utmost, arrive after years of hard labor at a sympathetic estimate of a few hundred selected individuals.

We first hear of Sainte-Beuve as a young medical student in Paris in the late eighteen-twenties, who shows for a student in medicine an inordinate interest in literature. Obviously he had chosen the wrong vocation, but just as a tree stretches instinctively toward light and air, he gravitated in the direction of literature. He was a pathetic figure, this ugly, sensitive young man whose imagination persisted in haunting the slopes of Parnassus when it should have been riveted on the operating-table. Poetry was gnawing at his vitals and with it a pitiful yearning for family life and affection that he was never destined to experience. Sainte-Beuve's muse was an essentially domestic creature. He aspired to be the poet of the foyer, to play the rôle in France that Cowper and Wordsworth had played in England. The union of intimacy and nature is rarely found in French poetry, and it was this typically English flower that Sainte-Beuve set himself to transplant. We may judge of his success by his first volume of poetry, pub-

lished in 1829 under the pseudonym of Joseph Delorme. Sainte-Beuve has saved his readers the trouble of formulating an opinion by referring in the introduction to "la monotonie des conceptions, la vérité un peu crue, l'horizon un peu borné de certains tableaux." But though as a critic he realized his limitations, he hoped, as every unsuccessful author has hoped from time immemorial, that somewhere there lurked a small but determined band of discriminating readers who would clasp him to their bosom.

This optimism was partly due to Victor Hugo, who in his big-hearted way was always encouraging the efforts of smaller fry. Before they ever met Sainte-Beuve had written a very favorable review of Hugo's *Odes et Ballades*, which had deeply gratified the young poet's thirst for eulogy. He called on Sainte-Beuve, who happened to be living next door to him in the rue Vaugirard. Sainte-Beuve returned the courtesy and within a few weeks he and the Hugo family were inseparable. At the time of their first meeting, in 1827, no two men could have been more profoundly different. Victor Hugo was one of those ebullient creatures who commandeer success wherever they go. He was

handsome, he had an adoring wife, to whom he was equally devoted, and a growing circle of admiring friends. If he was not rich he had a self-confidence and a fund of vitality that could be depended upon to tide him over any financial difficulties. Sainte-Beuve, on the other hand, was an unknown medical student who was trying to edge his way into literature by writing critical articles for the newspapers. He was an ungainly young man, obviously from the provinces to judge by his accent, with a muddy complexion, coarse features, and lank yellow hair. And yet the total effect was not displeasing; something in the expression of the eyes betrayed his intelligence. Victor liked him, and as for Madame Hugo, his adoration of her husband and Victor's evident enjoyment of his society were more than enough to make him welcome at all hours of the day.

It would have been better for all three if the friendship had not ripened into intimacy quite so quickly. Sainte-Beuve was hopelessly susceptible and, like most of the young romantics, he took his susceptibility very seriously. What he calls "le besoin inassouvi de sentir" had to find some expression. What could be more ob-

vious or more inevitable than that he should fall in love with Adèle Hugo? Perhaps he himself did not realize how much he depended upon her company until the boisterous preparations for the production of *Hernani* broke up the insidious three-cornered intimacy. Rarely has the issue of radical versus conservative appeared so momentous as it did to Victor Hugo and his henchmen in the winter of 1830. *Hernani* had to succeed at any price, and the price in this case was the continuous occupation of Madame Hugo's salon by a troupe of stalwart Bohemians. Night after night the theatre had to be packed by a well-organized claque and it fell to the lot of Adèle to distribute the square red tickets—symbols of romanticism—into safe hands. At such a time Sainte-Beuve was an indifferent ally. He hated the theatre, and still more he hated the noisy rabble that interrupted his pleasant tête-à-têtes with Madame Hugo. Victor, of course, was sublimely unconscious of Sainte-Beuve's disgust. With all his splendid creative energy he was, as a young man at any rate, curiously lacking in any insight of character. Occasionally he would ask Sainte-Beuve to read aloud from the *Consolations*, his new volume of

poetry, but the young critic realized that his muse would show to poor advantage in that high-spirited throng. No, it was better for him to stay away until the whirlwind had spent itself.

The *Consolations* marked a further step in Sainte-Beuve's development as the poet of intimate life. The family he knew best were the Hugos, and accordingly they form, as it were, the cornerstone of his new collection. The volume is dedicated to Victor Hugo in a long, rambling introduction, the full significance of which was probably lost on the eager young dramatist. "At the moment when you are embarking," writes Sainte-Beuve, "upon the stormy waters of the drama, may the recollections of family life bring you a fresh perfume from the shores you are leaving." And again in the same paragraph he refers to "l'image adorée du foyer, des enfants et de l'épouse." Though as yet he hardly dares confess it to himself, Sainte-Beuve shows a tender solicitude for Madame Hugo that might well have aroused her husband's uneasiness. But Victor was too busy to pay much attention to Sainte-Beuve's veiled forebodings. Even when the critic writes

him that their friendship is not likely to endure forever he dismisses the warning as being merely the expression of one of Sainte-Beuve's recurrent fits of melancholia.

And, indeed, like most of the literary lions of his age, Sainte-Beuve was a victim of the all-prevalent maladie du siècle. Byron had startled Europe with the pageant of his bleeding heart, Chateaubriand's *René* had inspired the youth of France with the dignity of introspective suffering, while across the Rhine the *Sorrows of Werther* were steeping all Germany in a welter of voluptuous languor. With such influences around him it is not surprising that Sainte-Beuve should almost have jumped at the opportunity of a hopeless passion. Adèle Hugo had the further advantage of being tenderly religious. In the *Poésies* of Joseph Delorme there was no hint of any belief in God, but with the *Consolations* Sainte-Beuve rounded the corner of scepticism. He had been brought up at Boulogne in a conventionally religious atmosphere, which was abruptly dispelled by his migration to Paris. As a medical student he soon acquired the free and easy contempt of the young scientist for anything beyond the

scope of investigation. This tendency was still further strengthened by his connection with the *Globe*, a newspaper of pronouncedly liberal views. It was in the *Globe* that Sainte-Beuve first championed the cause of the romantics, and it was through the influence of Pierre Leroux, the editor-in-chief, that he became interested in the cult of Saint-Simonism.

The founder of this cult, Saint-Simon, a descendant of the great diarist, was one of the early prophets of industrialism. He died in 1825, leaving behind him a few ardent but penniless disciples, who advocated a fantastic form of Socialism. Their theory of government involved among other things the abolition of all property rights and the arbitrary separation of mankind into a limited number of communistic societies. It seems strange to find Sainte-Beuve in such a milieu, but the *Globe* happening to fall into the hands of the Saint-Simonians, he was temporarily swept along with the tide. The year 1830 was the great period for social as well as literary experiments and Sainte-Beuve with his restless curiosity could not help being at least an interested spectator. At that age, moreover, he was continually casting about for

any system or creed that might bring relief to the "wild, unquenched, deep-sunken old-world pain." Alfred de Vigny, Musset, or George Sand could find an outlet in the new school of writing developed under the ægis of Victor Hugo, but Sainte-Beuve at the best was only a half-hearted romantic. For a while, as he said later, he put his judgment in his pocket and surrendered himself to his imagination, but only for a while. Constituted as he was he could not hope for comfort from a school of poetry that ignored the intellect, nor could he thrive on a diet of doctrinaire Socialism. There still remained religion, and under the charming tutelage of Adèle Hugo he re-embarked on the sea of orthodoxy.

To the admirers of Sainte-Beuve, this philandering with the wife of his best friend presents, to put it mildly, a serious stumbling-block. A man who can insinuate himself into the affections of a devoted couple, who can write of them

"Vous livrez aux doux riens vos deux cœurs reposés,
Vous vivez l'un dans l'autre et vous vous suffisez,"

and can then deliberately attempt to undermine their happiness, is simply a blackguard of the

first lustre. In his extenuation it can only be urged that the philandering, through no fault of his own, probably did not culminate in anything worse. The evidence against Sainte-Beuve is contained in his third volume of poetry, entitled *Livre d'Amour*, which of course should never have been written, far less published. What devil is it that occasionally incites men of letters to flaunt their nastiness before the public? Why must the world be burdened with Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris*, or Sainte-Beuve's *Livre d'Amour?* In these poems Sainte-Beuve infers that his godchild, little Adèle Hugo, is really his own daughter. Evidently Victor Hugo did not think so, as he never mentioned his wife either in his poetry or his private correspondence except to praise her. An even stronger refutation, however, is to be found in our own knowledge of Adèle Hugo. A woman who idolized her husband as she did, and who continued to admire him long after he had given her every ground for complaint, was not likely to have been swept off her feet by Sainte-Beuve. What then is the reason for his extraordinary innuendoes? We believe the only explanation possible is Sainte-Beuve's pathetic vanity. He went through life

craving the love of woman, and when that love was not forthcoming in the form he desired he conjured it up out of his imagination.

Before condemning him outright let us take into account the temper of his time. The moralists of to-day are apt to lament the shocking lack of reticence shown by men and women in public life, but the generation of 1830 was if possible even more free with its confidences. Alfred de Musset did not hesitate to publish the story of his liaison with George Sand in the *Confession d'un Enfant du Siècle*, nor did the critics reproach him with any breach of good taste. In the *Chants du Crépuscule* Victor Hugo refers to his wife and his mistress with equal enthusiasm. Less fortunate than either, Sainte-Beuve could not refrain from posing before the world as a great lover. Contemptible it certainly was, but hardly as utterly revolting as he would have us believe. Indeed, if we are to seek for autobiography in Sainte-Beuve's poetry, as his critics insist that we must, it seems only fair to accept his novel *Volupté* in the same light. The heroine, Madame de Couaen, is obviously based on Adèle Hugo, and it is significant that she remains virtuous to the very end. Incidentally

what a macabre end it is, with the husband and the would-be lover philosophizing over the departed as they hammer the nails into her coffin!

Whatever the relations may have been between Sainte-Beuve and Madame Hugo, it is not to be denied that the sentimental intimacy blossomed, bloomed, and withered within the space of three or four years. Considering the temperaments involved, quite apart from any question of sex, it could hardly have been otherwise. When Sainte-Beuve writes to Victor Hugo, "Je réfléchis, mon cher ami, que vous m'avez dit tantôt que Mme. Deschamps vous avez dit que je lui avais dit que vous n'avez pas de sensibilité," one does not have to be a pessimist to suspect that a lasting friendship is out of the question. Both sides made genuine efforts toward a reconciliation, but finally Sainte-Beuve accepted the inevitable and left Paris.

The year 1837 was full of emotional milestones. It marked the break with Adèle Hugo and with another friend, the Abbé Lamennais, who exercised a spell almost as potent. Lamennais was a French priest in excellent standing at Rome, who had established a certain name for himself by his eloquent denunciations of the re-

ligious indifference of Louis-Philippe and his government. Not content with this, however, he suddenly shifted his ground and attacked the Papacy for its remoteness from the life of the people. He demanded nothing less than the Papal approval of republican principles. Naturally he failed, but his deliberate challenge to church and state brought him tremendous popularity. Sainte-Beuve, always temporarily susceptible to the appeal of an ardent religious nature, championed the cause of Lamennais up to the time of his break with Rome. Then, abruptly disillusioned, he accused him of having wantonly extinguished the spark of faith he had kindled.

Close on the heels of this double estrangement came a stroke of good fortune. Sainte-Beuve was invited to Lucerne to give a course of lectures on Port-Royal. For all his inherent scepticism the story of Pascal and the Jansenists was well calculated to appeal to his imagination. The type of man who withdraws from the world in the attempt to solve life by thought rather than action was sure of sympathetic treatment at his hands. He may have been deficient in spontaneous enthusiasm over the obviously in-

spiring. His *Journal* of a trip to Rome is indeed more eloquent on fleas than on the Forum, but once Sainte-Beuve had warmed to his work his gusto was undeniable.

The five volumes on Port-Royal are, apart from anything else, the most conclusive answer to the charge that Sainte-Beuve was only a dilettante. For twenty years he whittled at this block of criticism until he had finally shaped it to his liking. Theology and philosophy, history and poetry, each in turn was called upon to deliver its quota toward the magnum opus. The lectures, however, from which this gigantic monograph was developed did not prove a success. Sainte-Beuve was never a success on the platform. His course of lectures on Chateaubriand delivered at Liége was only tolerated, and when he was appointed to the Collège de France his pupils literally howled him out of the building. To be sure, this was only partly due to ineffective speaking. In France the political opinions of a professor are carefully weighed by the students, and in Sainte-Beuve's case they were found decidedly wanting. He was condemned as a trimmer, one who made peace with each successive government a little

too quickly and then patched up the new-turned loyalty with threads of reason. Not until the end of his career, when he spoke up in an intensely reactionary Senate for liberty of the press, was he recognized as a champion of liberalism. For the greater part of his life public opinion was wrong about Sainte-Beuve, as it so often is wrong in its judgment of men who go through life intellectually independent. The very words with which he characterized Lamennais might well have been applied to himself: "Il n'a jamais sacrifié une idée ni un sentiment à un intérêt." His reputation as time-server was chiefly founded on an absurd charge made by the republicans in 1848, that he had accepted bribes from Louis-Philippe's government. Actually he had received a grant of one hundred francs for repairing a stove in the Mazarin Library of which he was librarian. In spite of his indignant denial Sainte-Beuve had to resign his seat and seek employment elsewhere. He thought of going to England or even of emigrating to America, but in the end the Belgian Minister in Paris helped him out of the quandary by offering him the post of professor of French literature at Liége. Thus, as M. Séché, Sainte-

Beuve's latest biographer, puts it, we owe the two excellent volumes on Chateaubriand to a smoky chimney.

Sainte-Beuve has been further criticised for making his peace with the Empire too soon. It would have been better or at least more picturesque if he had played the part of a die-hard and gone into exile, as Victor Hugo did, rather than to accept favors from Napoleon le Petit. Such was the argument of his enemies, and indeed if they looked for the picturesque in Sainte-Beuve's character they were bound to be disappointed. But after all, the world is not divided into time-servers and die-hards, nor is a man necessarily a hypocrite because he consents to live under a government that is not his ideal. Whatever his faults, and we have not attempted to slur them over, Sainte-Beuve was not a coward. When, as a young man, he was challenged to a duel he appeared at the appointed spot armed with an umbrella. His opponent, who was in no joking mood, expostulated angrily. "Je veux bien être tué," replied Sainte-Beuve, "mais je ne veux pas être mouillé." Thirty years later he was again challenged, this time by a fellow senator who objected to his defense

of Renan's *Life of Christ*. Sainte-Beuve answered the challenge by an exquisitely urbane letter in which he pointed out that duelling was an antiquated practice in which he took no interest. Furthermore, that he was at perfect liberty to express his opinions without being called to account by his colleagues. We submit that the strictest code of honor could not condemn his behavior on these two occasions as that of a poltroon.

The fact is that the sensual taint in Sainte-Beuve has been assumed to vitiate his whole character. He is represented as a satyr, a sycophant, a traducer of his friends, to whom the Fates in some inexplicable way allowed the one gift of literary criticism. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Sainte-Beuve's critical genius cannot be separated in any such arbitrary fashion from the rest of his character. We know Shelley to have been a fine, noble spirit, in spite of the fact that he broke Harriet's heart. We are prepared to admit that Rousseau was a man of some feeling, although he farmed out his children in orphan asylums. The paradox in Sainte-Beuve's character is almost equally obvious. Speaking of his criticism he remarks

rather pathetically: "Je soigne les enfants des autres et je n'en fais pas." The man who could thread his way so unerringly through the lives of others was completely bewildered when it came to piloting his own bark. But if he was wayward in his relations with women, in all other respects he was completely master of himself. If there ever was a man who loved his Paris it was Sainte-Beuve; but rather than submit for a moment to the stigma of bribery that the republicans tried to fasten upon him he was, as we have seen, ready at a moment's notice to forego Paris and all its works. His pleasant life as librarian, including a modest but sufficient salary, the visits to Chateaubriand at l'Abbaye-aux-Bois with the mingling in good society that that involved, were all relinquished without a murmur. "Écrire de temps en temps des choses agréables, en lire et d'agréables et de sérieuses, mais surtout ne pas trop écrire," had been the very summit of happiness for this nineteenth-century Horace. As he grew older it receded farther into the distance until toward the end of his life the *Causeries de Lundi* transformed him into a very galley-slave. Week after week a relentless public insisted that he accomplish

his tour de force. Even with the aid of two devoted secretaries it was all he could do to satisfy the ravenous maw of journalism. A feverish conscience forbade his ever taking a holiday. At midday on Monday he allowed himself a few hours' breathing-space, after which the pall would settle down again and he would be submerged for another week. But it was only by this fearful industry that the demon melancholy could be kept at a respectful distance.

Sainte-Beuve never cast off the despondent romanticism of his youth. In an article on Millevoye, an insignificant poet of the First Empire, he remarks that there is in almost all men a poet who dies young. Alfred de Musset, reading the article in question, immediately composed a graceful little poem urging Sainte-Beuve to remember—

> "qu'en nous il existe souvent,
> Un poète endormi, toujours jeune et vivant."

Probably Musset did not realize it, but his complimentary verses were curiously apt. Sainte-Beuve was haunted by poetry all his life. If he could only have discharged his feelings on paper he would have been a happier man. As it

was, intellect, the least lyrical of the faculties, cramped his poetry and he had to smother his disappointment in the drudgery of unintermittent criticism.

With his criticism we are not here concerned. Much has been written about its enormous scope and its uniform standard of excellence, yet still we feel that the half has not been told. Something at least remains to be said about Sainte-Beuve's splendid independence of judgment. The complete freedom from charlantanism, which appealed so strongly to Matthew Arnold, demonstrated the best and most masculine traits in Sainte-Beuve's character. No suspicion of log-rolling ever attached itself to his name. If he was won over to an acquiescence in the Empire, "ce mesure de police un peu rude," as he termed Napoleon's coup d'état, he never failed to castigate the imperial leanings toward absolutism. He refused to devote a causerie to Napoleon's *Life of Cæsar*, just as thirty years earlier he had refused to join in the popular chorus of praise over Alfred de Vigny's *Cinq Mars*. In literature a half-hearted romantic, in politics an uncertain partisan, it is not surprising that radical and conservative alike condemned him

as too restless a bedfellow. Only at the end of his life did he catch the popular fancy as a stalwart defender of the people's rights. He had been appointed to the Senate to lend dignity to an otherwise colorless body. Known as an ineffective speaker, he was not expected to take part in the debates, but Sainte-Beuve could never be depended upon to do the obvious thing. He championed the causes of secondary education and the liberty of the press with an energy and good-will that astounded the Emperor. How was it that this bookworm whom he had so signally honored dared speak in support of such dangerous theories? And whenever Sainte-Beuve spoke he dislodged an avalanche of criticism on Napoleon's internal administration. One phrase in particular caught the ear of the public: "l'Empire a une droite et une gauche, et à gauche est le cœur." We are not surprised that after that speech Sainte-Beuve was definitely alienated from his friends in the imperial circle.

The speeches in the Senate, which transformed Sainte-Beuve into something of a popular hero, proved to be the last flash in the pan. He died in 1869, too soon to see the collapse of

the Empire of which he was almost the only discriminating supporter. The happiness which he had dreamed of as a young man, the doux foyer that he so envied Victor Hugo, never fell to his lot. In its place he had to content himself with a few warm friendships and the admiration of all true lovers of literature. As we take our leave of him it is impossible not to be struck by the paradox in his character. He combined extraordinary sophistication with the most pitiful adolescence. Possibly too much has been made of his shortcomings, for in this age we are abnormally interested in personalities. If this be a fault Sainte-Beuve himself is largely to blame. No critic has so consistently approached the study of literature via the author's personality. Perhaps it is for this reason that Sorel maintains that the great *Comédie Humaine* of the nineteenth century was written by Sainte-Beuve.

GÉRARD DE NERVAL

The Rue de la Vieille Lanterne, one of the most unsavory streets of old Paris, no longer exists except in the lithographs of Gustave Doré and Célestin Nanteuil. Its place is now occupied by the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt. No one regrets its disappearance, for it had no claim on the affections of antiquarians. It was famous, or rather notorious, for only one thing — the suicide of Gérard de Nerval. On the morning of February 26, 1855, a man was seen hanging from one of the lower windows of a sordid rooming-house. If the first passer-by had been quick enough, he might still have found traces of life, but by the time the gendarmes arrived it was too late. There was nothing to do but cut down the body, send it to the Morgue, and search the pockets for identification. Who was it? Evidently an author, a dreamer of strange dreams, to judge from the manuscript found on him, one who had known the inside of a maison de santé and had apparently been allowed out too soon. Later in the day Théophile Gautier recognized

the body as that of le bon Gérard. There is no reason to suppose that he was the victim of foul play. Gérard had no enemies beyond his own dreams, and besides, his thoughts were known to have been running along dangerous channels for a long time. The very letters in his pocket told of an impulse to throw himself into the Seine, and obviously when the suicidal mania attacked him again he had succumbed. Romanticism, the longing for the unknown and the invisible, had reached its logical conclusion.

"Dans l'armée romantique," says Théophile Gautier, "comme dans l'armée d'Italie, tout le monde était jeune." Napoleon was only twenty-six when he led his ragged soldiers into the plains of Lombardy; Victor Hugo was under thirty when he rocked the literary world with *Hernani*. Without pressing the parallel too far, it is surely not fantastic to see some resemblance between the promised land of Italy and the rich pastures of romanticism. Granted the brilliant leadership, both could be won by enthusiasm and courage, but in neither case could assistance be expected from the outside. If the army of Italy succeeded, it was not thanks to the wiseacres in the Directory, nor was Victor Hugo in-

debted to any literary patron for his victory over the outworn forms of classicism.

In the year 1830 France was blessed or cursed, according to the point of view, with a bourgeois King. Louis-Philippe walked about the streets in plain clothes, carried an aggressively plebeian umbrella, and wore a shabby hat pulled down over his eyes. If he had been acting the part of a commercial traveller in private theatricals he could not have succeeded better. It was a bold bid for popularity, but it showed a pitiful ignorance of national psychology. The generation that had been, as Musset puts it, "conçus entre deux batailles, élevés aux roulements des tambours," was not likely to be fascinated by an insignificant little man who clutched at his horse's mane with one hand while returning the salute with the other. Is it to be wondered at that the young men born during the Consulate and the Empire should have inherited an appetite for glory? And is it surprising that with their splendid heritage of adventure they were not content to follow the great highroads of tradition.

In the thirties youth was almost a synonym for extravagance. "Épater les bourgeois" was

the darkest wish of every young man who felt a spark of genius within him. To be sure, it was not a very difficult task. Gautier's crimson waistcoat, Victor Hugo's preface to *Cromwell*, announcing his adherence to Shakespeare rather than to Racine — these were the things that shocked the sensibilities of the whole community. Night after night the Théâtre Français went into an uproar over the line, "Est-il minuit? Minuit bientôt." The idea of a King asking what time it was in the very words a shopkeeper might use was preposterous. And then the reply, "Minuit bientôt" — who ever heard of a rustic answering a King so informally? To us it is almost incredible that such excitement should have been aroused over the minutiæ of form. Indeed, it is not easy to understand the overwhelming success of *Hernani*. The story of that eventful first night has repeatedly been told, and never better than by Gautier in his *History of Romanticism*. How Victor Hugo scorned the support of a paid claque, how his own friends and admirers, headed by young Gautier, thronged into the pit and gallery hours before the performance was supposed to begin, and sat there munching sandwiches, humming

the lyrics of their master, and in every possible way outraging the feelings of the bons bourgeois, suffers no loss of picturesqueness in Gautier's reminiscences.

But there were others besides Gautier. Petrus Borel, with his long, silky beard, in itself an outrage to society, and a young poet named Gérard de Nerval. What happened during those twenty-odd years between the first night of *Hernani* and the tragedy in the Rue de la Vieille Lanterne? In 1830 Gérard Labrunie, as he was then known, was one of the most enviable young men in Paris. He had published several volumes of poetry before leaving school, and his translation of *Faust* had received a very genuine compliment from Goethe himself. "I have never understood myself so well," he wrote to the young poet, "as in reading your translation." At the Collège Charlemagne, where his father had sent him to school, he was equally beloved by masters and students. His father was probably the one cloud in his horizon. Labrunie, or, rather, Doctor Labrunie, for he had been a médecin majeur in the Grande Armée, did not look with sympathy on his son's literary successes. He would have liked him to be a

diplomat or a doctor, instead of which the boy was steeping himself in German mysticism. Perhaps if Madame Labrunie had lived, he might have understood his son better, but she died of a fever at the time of the retreat from Moscow, leaving the boy at the age of five to the kindly but inflexible old doctor.

For the first few years of his life Gérard Labrunie led a delightful Arcadian existence in the village of Loisy in Valois. Perhaps he suffered afterward from the almost exclusively feminine society of those early days, for he was brought up by his aunt and his only companions were her daughters and their friends; but he was still a child when his father came home from the wars and took him away to Paris. He was not so young, however, as to forget his beloved Valois. During the holidays he went back regularly to renew the old friendships, and in particular to see Sylvie, with whom he had kept up a running flirtation ever since they had dressed up as "des mariés du vieux temps" for the delectation of an old grandmother. Eventually she married a pastry-cook, but that made no difference in Gérard's feelings for her. He was always falling in love in a delicate imaginative

way with women who were incapable of understanding his emotions. That they all married some one else was of little importance. The tragedy lay in his own habit of etherealizing the ladies of his affection, regardless of the fact that to the rest of the world they were very obviously mere flesh and blood.

But in those early days, after leaving the Collège Charlemagne, the memories of Sylvie did not claim all Gérard's attention. The question of his career had not yet been decided. To gratify his father he tried medicine for two years, but his heart was never in it. Luckily he inherited a small fortune, which enabled him to gratify his bent for writing without leaning too heavily on his father's generosity. These were the golden years of his life, when he lived with Arsène Houssaye, the author of the charming *Confessions*, and Camille Rogier, the etcher, in the Rue Doyenné. Next door was Théophile Gautier, who had been a devoted friend ever since they had sat together on the same bench at school. Gautier was still hovering between literature and painting, as indeed was Camille Rogier. Never before had the dividing line between the arts appeared so indistinct. After all,

as long as they expressed themselves, the medium adopted, whether it were brush or pen, was comparatively unimportant.

To a close observer it might have been evident that Gérard was not tarred with quite the same brush as his companions. He was determined to be more sane. The flaunting banner of eccentricity under which they were so proud to fight he had long since discarded. His clothes were as inconspicuous as possible. Apparently it was his desire to look more or less like other people, for he affected neither the insolence of the dandy nor the truculence of the Bohemian. Even in literature it would seem that his chief desire was to pass unnoticed, for he did not even sign his own name to his articles. The "Nerval," which had been adopted on account of a fancied descent from the Roman Emperor Nerva, gave place to a variety of pseudonyms. At one time he was "Louis Gerval," at another "Aloysius" or "Fritz" or "Block" — anything to prevent the public from becoming familiar with his identity.

Like many other young men of his time, Gérard "poured innumerable buckets into the bottomless well of journalism." But busy as he

was with the newspapers, he had other and more absorbing interests. With the modest fortune that he had inherited he founded a magazine called the *Monde Théâtral*. It was not merely a dispassionate interest in the theatre that tempted him to this venture, but a very real devotion to an actress, in whom he imagined that his highest ideals of perfection, intellectual as well as artistic, were realized. Supported by the heavy artillery of the *Monde Théâtral*, Gérard hoped that his inamorata might force her way into grand opera. Needless to say, Jenny Colon bore little resemblance to the radiant vision conceived in Gérard's fancy. She was a popular young comédienne with a pretty voice and a certain talent for rather obvious ingénue parts. Coming of a theatrical family, she had already plunged in and out of matrimony before meeting Gérard, nor did his determination to treat her as a Princesse Lointaine prevent her from bestowing herself — and this time very happily — upon an obscure flute-player.

Gérard, however, persisted in his adoration. To watch Jenny Colon from the front row in the orchestra was all the nourishment his passion needed. For years, indeed, he never knew

her, and perhaps it was just as well. Familiarity would have been almost certain to breed contempt. The few occasions on which he did meet her seem to have been uniformly unfortunate. The first time he called he had the ill-luck to break a priceless vase, the cherished gift of a more favored suitor. Horrified at his awkwardness, he rushed to the nearest antiquaire to find something in the nature of a peace-offering. His fancy happened to alight on an enormous Renaissance bed, said to have belonged once to Marguerite de Valois. Again the fates were against him, for the bed was too big to go into any normal room. Finally it found a home in Gautier's studio, where it remained until Gautier's démenagement necessitated its being sold.

Meanwhile Jenny Colon had married the flute-player and drifted out of Gérard's horizon. For any other man the romance would have ended there, but Gérard was powerless to dismiss her from his imagination. Wherever he went — and after her marriage and the consequent collapse of the *Monde Théâtral* he had begun to travel — he was beset by her image. Under the name of Aurelia she recurs continually in *Les Filles du Feu* — "Faces in the Fire," we

might render it — a delightful collection of stories, half fiction and half autobiography. Gérard was never a sedentary man, and after the shock of her marriage continuous travelling became almost a necessity. Italy, the haven of all romanticists, he knew already; now it was Flanders and Germany that called to him. Sometimes he set forth alone, but more often with a companion. Gautier describes a trip they made together, in that charming little volume, *Caprices et Zigzags*. What a contrast they must have made — Gautier absorbed in everything the brush could depict or the pen describe, worried only because the Rubens type of woman seemed to be extinct, and Gérard completely indifferent to scenery or people, deep in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and not to be disturbed from his reveries by his companion's pleasant chatter about Rubens and his flesh tints.

Another companion on his travels was Dumas *fils*, with whom he collaborated on several plays. It was with Dumas that he wrote *Leo Burckardt*, an early example of the now familiar plot of the young idealist plunging whole-heartedly into politics and emerging embittered and disillusioned. Dumas, who did not usually err on the side of

modesty, gave Gérard all the credit for their joint productions, and we can well believe that collaboration, difficult enough at any time, must have been almost impossible with Gérard. He could not work indoors, he had always to be moving from one place to another, and the railroad affected his nerves. There was something devastating about its directness. If only it had not ignored geography, if it had lost its way occasionally, he might have been able to stand it. As it was, however, he longed for the old-fashioned berlin, which jolted the body to pieces but at least allowed the soul the luxury of wandering.

It was when he got back to Paris after one of his playwriting tours with Dumas that Gérard's innocent fancies began to assume more serious proportions. One morning he was found walking through the Palais Royal leading a lobster on the end of a blue ribbon. And why should he not associate with lobsters? he asked. In what way were they more ridiculous than dogs or cats or gazelles, or any of the other animals that man has at one time or another trained to follow him? It seems now that his friends might well have been alarmed by these pecu-

liarities, but in those days of rampant individualism eccentricity of behavior was not necessarily an indication of mental disorders. As soon as Gérard began to write, all semblance of insanity disappeared. He was never perhaps as outré in his expression as many of his friends. In spite of his great interest in German philosophy and his reverence for Goethe, he remained the most typically French of all the romanticists. "Le seul défaut qu'on puisse lui reprocher," says Gautier, "c'est trop de la sagesse." And, curiously enough, in his last years, when his poor brain was trembling on the edge of a precipice, his literary restraint reached its high-water mark. If Mr. Chesterton should ever be tempted to write about Gérard de Nerval, we can imagine him stoutly maintaining the paradox that Gérard was actually sobered by madness. Compared, for instance, with De Quincey, what moderation there is in his description of dreams! The Opium Eater's visions are an excuse for gorgeous flights of rhetoric. Even when his imagination conjures up the homely figure of Ann of Oxford Street he cannot cast off the shackles of the "grand manner." Gérard's dreams, on the other hand, are

all subjected to his habitual economy of style. Such stories as *La Main Enchantée* or *Le Monstre Vert*, written when he was a young man, show what he might have done if he had been content to follow in the footsteps of Hoffmann or Poe; but as he grew older he conceived a more sober rôle for himself. "Si je ne pensais que la mission d'un écrivain est d'analyser sincèrement ce qu'il éprouve dans les graves circonstances de la vie, et si je ne proposai un but que je crois utile, je m'arrêterai ici." But Gérard did not stop; he kept on analyzing, always trying to rationalize his emotions until his constant groping after the inexplicable drove him to the supreme disaster.

The great distinction between Gérard de Nerval and most men of genius who have suffered from occasional mental derangement was that his lapses were never caused by any weakness of character. At no time of his life was he either a drunkard or a drug fiend. If we must find a reason for his madness, it was his inability to forget, coupled with an abnormally weak mental digestion. Much of the literature he read as a child, including the eighteenth-century philosophers, was probably too heady for him; and

while most boys would have thrown it off as they grew older, Gérard continued to absorb it into his constitution. Whenever his brain was stimulated or his emotions stirred, it was for all time. A sudden passion for a popular actress, a sentimental attachment for some cousin in the country, a chapter from Rousseau or a phrase of Goethe — such things stayed with him forever.

At one time he became interested in the possibilities of aviation, not from a scientific point of view but from a typically romantic angle. Cyrano de Bergerac's *Voyage à la Lune* fired his imagination to such an extent that he wrote an essay on the successors of Icarus. Probably few men have known less about aerostatics than Gérard de Nerval, but once the idea had been presented to his brain it was impossible for him to let it go. Again — it is curious how often Gérard stumbles near our modern inventions — his interest in Gutenberg and the fathers of printing led him to conceive of a one-man printing-press. Though he actually took out a patent for an intended invention, he never troubled to inform himself as to the actual state of development in typography. Whatever he hoped to achieve, he would be untrammelled by tech-

nical knowledge. But his reverence for the art of printing, based on nothing more solid than the natural curiosity of a child, never left him. With him the dividing lines between history, science, and magic were always shadowy. As he grew older, science and history faded more and more into the background, while magic fastened itself upon his imagination, until finally nostalgia for the invisible drove him to suicide.

Probably his voyage to the Orient following immediately upon his first attack of insanity, was not calculated to restore his mental balance. He became engaged to the daughter of a sheik, and almost persuaded the reluctant father that being a Freemason was the same thing as being a Mohammedan. A lucky fever intervened to save him, and he returned to Paris outwardly none the worse but subconsciously dangerously excited by his Oriental experiences. Though the published account of his travels sold well, he now added to his existing worries a terror of bankruptcy. As long as he was travelling the bogey could be kept at a distance, but as soon as he came back to Paris — and he would rarely persuade himself to stay away for more than a

few months at a time — a pall of melancholia settled down on him.

It would be difficult to determine the predominant cause of his last and, as it subsequently proved, fatal attack in 1853. The death of Aurelia and the studied indifference of his father certainly contributed to his final breakdown. To be neglected, if not actually disliked, by the two people he loved most in the world, must have been a terrible shock to a man of his sensibilities. We cannot perhaps blame Jenny Colon for not accepting him in the guise of a lover, particularly when we consider his strangely candid love-making. "Soyez bien sûre," he writes to her, "que je vous aime bien plus que je ne vous admire." But the indifference of his father is more difficult to excuse. From being a kindly old soldier Doctor Labrunie had developed into a stiff-necked disciplinarian. Gérard had made his own bed and he had better lie in it. That was the attitude of the old man, and no display of affection on the part of his son could ever compensate for his lack of obedience.

A further cause of insanity was his growing delusion that the end of the world was at hand. One night he drove to the house of Heinrich

Heine, with whom he had become very intimate, and ordered him to make ready at once for the Day of Judgment. The poet stared at him open-mouthed, but Madame Heine, the more resourceful member of the family, called a cab and drove with him at once to the sanitarium. Twice he was reported cured and each time he had to be brought back. During one of his lucid intervals he wrote a very sensible and temperate appeal to the Société des Gens de Lettres requesting them to use their influence to have him set at liberty. He demanded only the right to earn his living and to pay off the large sums of money advanced to him by his friends. The doctors allowed themselves to be convinced against their better judgment, and Gérard left the asylum for the last time. The remaining days of his life remain a mystery. With infinite difficulty he wrote *Sylvie*, which was published as an autobiographical fragment in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and was at once recognized as a masterpiece. A few days after its publication his body was found in the Rue de la Vieille Lanterne.

There are people to-day who cannot see *Le Malade Imaginaire* with any pleasure. Behind

Argan, the foolish dyspeptic, they are constantly aware of Molière, sick in mind and body, scarcely able to drag his way through the part and dying of pneumonia almost before the applause was over. There is something of the same effect about *Sylvie*. Behind this charming idyl of country life, we see Gérard prowling about the streets of Paris, fighting for reason and liberty, and finally succumbing to the insistent attacks of his fevered imagination.

Gérard had travelled a long way from the turgid romanticism of 1830. While his friends were still struggling in the fetters forged by Victor Hugo he had emerged from the charmed dungeon. The very titles of his essays — *Petits Chateaux de Bohème*, *Les Nuits d'Octobre*, *Promenades et Souvenirs*, *Musique* — indicate how successfully he had escaped from the rococo atmosphere of *Hernani*. His imagination was certainly no less active than that of his contemporaries, but almost alone in that generation he carried on the French tradition of sobriety and economy of style. Gérard de Nerval, the madman, remained the sanest of them all. As to the charm of his writings, it is as elusive as the charm of the *Essays of Elia* or the *Sentimental*

Journey. Like Charles Lamb and Sterne, he wanders apparently care-free in the No-Man's-Land between realism and sentiment. He is indeed the only real sentimental traveller we have met with in French literature. One of the first to rediscover Ronsard, he was at the same time the champion of his own age. A delicate poet, a writer of exquisite prose, a madman, and a suicide — the only fault his friend Gautier could find to reproach him with was an excess of sanity. He was one of those unfortunates whose fate it is to pull against the stream, and though eventually he found a pleasant backwater it offered him no outlet on the main current of literature.

BARBEY D'AUREVILLY

It was at Bray on the Somme in 1916 that I first made the acquaintance of Barbey D'Aurevilly. There was a French battery on the south side of the river, and I formed the habit of dropping in on the officers occasionally — partly to exercise my French and partly to see something of the world before the next push began. We exchanged newspapers and magazines, and finally — as we got to know each other better — novels. I lent Lieutenant Jacomet *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and he entrusted me with his battered copy of *Le Chevalier Des Touches*. He had never heard of Hardy before, and the name of Barbey D'Aurevilly was equally unfamiliar to me. Neither of us, as I remember it, had any intention of making a gift, but, as we both read each other's languages equally slowly, our batteries were ordered back into action before the books could be returned. Some day I hope to meet Jacomet again and find out what he thought of Tess. Then I shall launch forth on Barbey, and I shall remind Jacomet of his part-

ing words of commendation: "Tenez, je vous donne Barbey, lisez-le, c'est un chic type."

We have no English equivalent for a "chic type," but no man who has seen anything of France during the last seven years will want to have the phrase explained. It implies courage, a ready wit, if not actual intelligence, and above all things distinction, which is precisely the point at which our efforts at definition break down. After reading *Le Chevalier Des Touches* I had at least a faint understanding of what the words meant. The hero is a Chouan, one of those determined loyalists who never recognized the French Revolution, or the Directoire, or the Consulate, or the Empire, and who, when the Bourbons did return to power, was too old and broken in health to reap any benefit. But *Le Chevalier Des Touches* is more than a mere record of the life and adventures of a reactionary die-hard. It is, as the text-books would say, an epic poem in prose, a novel in which the author has distilled all his local patriotism, all his veneration for the giants of other days, in the white heat of consummate literary art.

Barbey D'Aurevilly would not like to be known as an artist. He preferred to think of

himself as a man of action, and it was always his bitter regret that his parents did not allow him to become a soldier. He was born in Normandy in 1808, too late for the Napoleonic wars and too early to be able to play the part in the war of 1870 that he would have liked. His father, of whom he gives such a charming picture in the dedication of *Le Chevalier Des Touches*, was an ardent royalist, who had passed his life "maître chez lui, dans un loisir plein de dignité, fidèle à des opinions qui ne triomphaient pas." This father would have been only too glad if his son had followed in his footsteps, but the young Jules Amédée Barbey (the D'Aurevilly was added afterward) must needs see the world. He goes to school in Paris, where he makes friends with Maurice de Guérin, and is heart-broken when his parents summon him home, expecting him to live there happily ever afterward. As M. Barbey will not listen to the boy's military aspirations, and as Jules refuses to stay at home, they finally compromise on his going to Caen to study for the bar. There he makes his second great friend, one M. Trébutien, a shy, retiring librarian, with whom he corresponds ardently for over thirty years.

While studying for the bar young Barbey very nearly succeeds in breaking his father's heart. He and Trébutien found a journal advocating the decentralization of government and the adoption of democratic reforms. Thank heavens, the review fails after the first number, but the father is none the less scandalized. It was the first and, as it subsequently appeared, the last time that any Barbey had ever flirted with democracy. While furious letters are being exchanged between father and son a godfather very conveniently dies, leaving young Barbey a small legacy, which enables him to go back to his beloved Paris. A new review is started, again with the help of Trébutien, embracing the modest field of philosophy, science, and literature. Needless to say, this venture also fails, and with its failure Jules suffers a mental breakdown.

So far his life has not been a success. He has antagonized his father, he has spent all his money, and he has not yet startled the literary world. Worse than that, he is unsettled in his own mind. His youthful leanings toward democracy have disappeared, but nothing has yet taken their place. The wild romanticism of

Byron and Goethe has descended upon him like a pall, and he finds himself, with so many other young men in the early nineteenth century, a prey to "blank misgivings . . . moving about in worlds not realized." But men do not die of romantic fever, and Barbey is soon writing notes of badinage to Trébutien and planning to earn his living as a journalistic free-lance. Not that he has any respect for the press, but it satisfies to a certain extent his taste for public life. He flatters himself that he has carried a local election by the weight of his pen, and that the editors will soon find his personality, to say nothing of his political articles, absolutely indispensable.

Barbey's personality was never the asset that he fondly imagined. It may have enabled him to face the world with more equanimity than other struggling young journalists displayed, but it never made a favorable impression upon the editors. After the first youthful bout with democracy, followed by the plunge into romanticism, he emerged as a dandy. He even wrote a life of Beau Brummell and a history of dandyism. Nor was his dandyism a mere pose; it was an honest conviction involving a drastic self-

discipline. The term has fallen into considerable disrepute in these democratic days, but as Barbey understood dandyism it was far from being entirely contemptible. Aristocratic principles are pleasant enough when they are founded on a comfortable income; but Barbey had no income. Extreme elegance of outward appearance is not usually associated with a rigid sense of economy, but in Barbey the paradox never faltered. He lived in one modestly furnished room, he never borrowed money, and yet he bore himself with the air of a D'Orsay. In addition to extravagance of dress his creed required a sturdy independence and a steadfast devotion to fixed standards. Barbey never wore his heart on his sleeve and he never complained of hard luck. Whatever the bludgeonings of chance, he deemed it his duty to preserve an exquisite deportment before the world. No better illustration could be found of that delightful mot of Sem, the great cartoonist, "Après tout, le courage ce n'est qu'une espèce d'élégance."

Unfortunately for Barbey, his fixed standards were not shared by anybody else. The Pope, the Monarchy, and the literary tradition of

Louis XIV — these were the colors he sailed under for over fifty years. Other men may have held the same beliefs, but never to the same extent. He antagonized the legitimists by his clamoring for an absolute monarchy, he offended the clericals, and he infuriated the apostles of literary freedom. With all his respect for authority he was the most rabid individualist that ever fought under the banner of tradition. No newspaper could endure his persistent truculence for long. While he was on the *Figaro* he attacked the *Revue des Deux Mondes* so virulently that the editor sued him and the *Figaro* cast him off. On this occasion Gambetta defended him, and claimed that he would have won the suit if Barbey had not deliberately affronted the court by appearing in such an outrageous waistcoat. As it was, he had to pay two thousand francs and seek employment elsewhere. He next assailed the Académie Française from the vantage-ground of the *Nain Jaune*, while at the same time keeping up a running fire on the theatres. Eventually he was refused admittance to the theatres, but no opposition daunted him. It was in vain for an editor to announce that M. Barbey had joined the staff of his newspaper in

the capacity of franc-tireur. The incorrigible M. Barbey promptly turned round and attacked the editor himself.

It is amazing that this Don Quixote, forever tilting at windmills real or imaginary, should have been able to earn his living by journalism. He made it a point of honor to denounce every literary or political clique that showed its head above the horizon, not so much because he disapproved of its tenets, though that was quite likely, but because it was a clique. No poet, no statesman, could achieve greatness in his eyes unless he were prepared to stand apart from his fellow men. The bourgeoisie was "toujours la grande bête qu'elle n'a pas cessé d'être depuis qu'elle est entrée, comme un âne dans le pré, dans la politique." Such opinions, especially when shouted at the top of one's voice, do not tend toward popularity. While the rest of Paris went into ecstasies over *Les Misérables*, Barbey D'Aurevilly insisted that there was too much rodomontade about Victor Hugo. Barbey was a true romantic in his insistence on "feeling," but the feeling must come from the heart, not from the pen. Once he had decided that an author "ne palpitait pas," he had no

further use for him. Victor Hugo and even Balzac were frequently guilty of not "palpitating," but Sainte-Beuve was the arch criminal in this respect. He was too urbane for Barbey D'Aurevilly. The real critic should discard his carpet slippers and be prepared at a moment's notice to storm the strongholds of prejudice, pistol in hand.

And yet this fantastic creature, challenging all comers in his blue frock-coat and gold buttons, his jewelled cane and his mousquetaire hat, held his own in the rough-and-tumble fight of literature. He did not spend all his time attacking other men's gods. The hours in his garret in the rue Rousselet were productive of something more permanent than the diatribes against the Academy and the fulminations against contemporary poets. Barbey D'Aurevilly was famous in his own generation as the most picturesque figure on the boulevards, a ferocious critic and a brilliant causeur, but posterity will know him as a novelist. That prejudice against everything suggestive of democracy, which is the fatal flaw running through all his criticism, becomes almost an asset in his novels. Certainly no man was ever more enamored of the past or more

uniformly successful in communicating his ardor to the reader.

To understand Barbey the novelist we must forget for a moment Barbey the boulevardier. The crowds who heard him holding forth in the cafés or who watched him parading down the Champs Elysées doubtless thought of him as being Parisian to the core. But the Paris veneer was only a mask; from first to last Barbey was always a Norman. Year after year he went back to his old home at Saint-Sauveur-le-Vicomte to soak himself in that familiar Norman countryside he knew so well. Paris was merely the platform from which he addressed his audience. To Victor Hugo, or Gautier, or Musset, a long absence from Paris was nearly synonymous with intellectual starvation, but to Barbey D'Aurevilly it was a source of infinite relief. He was not a nature-lover, nor had he any of that Wanderlust so characteristic of the earlier romantics. Chateaubriand's Red Indians left him as unmoved as Victor Hugo's Outre-Rhin. All that his soul craved was that little corner of Normandy known as the Presqu'île de Cotentin, where his imagination, aided by the local traditions, could conjure up the death-struggles of the ancien régime.

With the exception of Byron, whose romantic opulence went to his head like champagne, Barbey's favorite English authors were Burns and Sir Walter Scott. The fact that they both happen to be Scotchmen is surely not without significance. The love of one's pays even more than the love of one's patrie exercised a tremendous fascination over him. He felt a sort of spiritual kinship with England on account of the common Norman ancestry. The Normans and the English were cousins, "fils de la même barque des pirates." In *Le Chevalier Des Touches* the abbé is named Percy, and the author is at some pains to explain that a collateral branch of the Dukes of Northumberland still flourishes in Normandy.

It was Barbey's great ambition to surround the Chouan guerrilla warfare with the same glamour that Sir Walter Scott has cast over the Scottish Border. He planned a series of chronicles, of which unfortunately only *Le Chevalier Des Touches* and *L'Ensorcelée* were ever finished. Barbey was quick to seize upon the special advantages that his beloved Normandy offered to the historical novelist. There were no Cromwells or Richelieus or Napoleons to be fitted into his romances. There was no need of any Pro-

crustes' bed to make the characters conform to the plot. They were all local heroes awaiting the author's magic touch to bring them national recognition. The best explanation of these imperturbable chevaliers is to be found in the words of Commandant Mesnil in one of the *Diabolique* stories: "Les hommes comme moi n'ont été faits de toute éternité que pour étonner les hommes comme toi." That is just it. All his heroes are supermen, visions of himself glorified and transported into the fairylands of chivalry.

Lemaître, one of the keenest of modern French critics, remarks on the suppression of all psychology in Barbey D'Aurevilly's novels. Glutted as we are to-day with psycho-analysis, Barbey D'Aurevilly's *Diaboliques* are positively refreshing. There is no effort to explain anything except by the power of God and the will of the Devil. His heroines are ensorcelées, his heroes are possédés; so much we must be prepared to grant, and if we find it too great a strain on the imagination Barbey would have us go elsewhere. His religion was the Catholicism of the Middle Ages, undiluted by any modern theories of tolerance or symbolism. The *Dia-*

boliques would lose half their terrors for the atheist, and it is indeed only the man who believes in a personal God and a personal Devil who can appreciate the full horror of *L'Ensorcelée*.

What claim to favor have these novels apart from the author's infectious devotion to the ancien régime? Simply that they are the record of a human experience transmuted by the alchemy of a rich imagination. The same claim might be advanced for all great romances, from the *Iliad* to *Ivanhoe* or *Henry Esmond*. Barbey's stories do not come tumbling down like mountain torrents, nor do they unwind themselves slowly but inevitably like a peaceful river. It is as if he had to pump them out of his brains. He has a passion for setting the scene, for testing his apparatus, for stopping and telling the history of every character before he will finally consent to ring up the curtain. Those who only travel to arrive at their destination will do well to skip the first few chapters of every novel, but Barbey's meanderings do not lead the reader into a desolate wilderness. He has no patience with the author who plays tricks with his style just to show his rhetorical dexterity, nor does he ever countenance the pernicious theory of art

for art's sake. He had, however, a natural fondness for architectural effects. Instead of revealing his purpose in a sudden flash he preferred to build up a formidable structure from which the whole panorama of his story could be observed. The pages devoted to the "lande" in *L'Ensorcelée*, that wild, trackless country only known to the Gypsies, have often been cited as the high-water mark of Barbey's descriptive writing. Certainly he is a great paysagiste, as the French say, but these descriptions are as integral a part of the story as the witch scenes in *Macbeth*. Eliminate them, and the picturesque figure of the Abbé de Croix Jugan loses half its meaning.

Unquestionably Barbey D'Aurevilly would have been a greater novelist if, like Balzac, for instance, he had been able to break the fetters of the past. But he was not a genius; he was only a man of rare talent. He saw no benefits to be gained from the upheaval of society, and he refused to follow the line of least resistance in the wake of contemporary journalism. The constitutional monarchy, the republic, the empire, and the commune—he had no use for any of them, because they were not founded on the rock-bed of unity and authority. Paul Bourget,

in one of his penetrating criticisms, remarks that Goethe's philosophy could be summed up in the word "s'adapter," and that diametrically opposed to him was M. D'Aurevilly, with his inflexible creed, "résister." The leavening effect in society of a few men like Barbey D'Aurevilly is not to be ignored. For the greater part of his life he was unknown except as an elegant eccentric, but long before his death his noble literary independence had won the respect of all men of letters. He had attacked most of the lions of his day, but none of them bore him any rancor. The furious sorties of the old Chouan had become almost a national institution.

There is one debt the world owes him that we have not yet mentioned. On the death of his friend Maurice de Guérin in 1839 Barbey constituted himself his literary executor. At that time, however, no editor would undertake to publish the works of an "ignoré qui n'a pour patron qu'un inconnu." Barbey held his tongue, and thirty years later, when he had achieved a certain degree of fame, the works of Guérin were finally published. Even then Sainte-Beuve devoted a *Causerie* to them without mentioning Barbey D'Aurevilly's name.

His friendship for Eugénie de Guérin — "l'adorablement laide Eugénie," as he refers to her on one occasion — is surely one of the most remarkable in literary history. How different they were — the delicate thoughtful girl who inspired "une sorte d'admiration muette" wherever she went, and the gallant old warrior who was forever shivering a lance in defense of his impossible ideals! And yet, different as they were, something bound them together. Matthew Arnold speaks of Eugénie's characteristic quality of distinction. "Of this quality," he says, "the world is impatient; it chafes against it, rails at it, insults it, hates it; it ends by receiving its influence and by undergoing its law." Was it not this quality that my friend Jacomet had recognized in Barbey D'Aurevilly? Unconsciously for the most part every soldier was groping for it to tide him over to sanity across the reefs of despondency and despair.

VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM

Sooner or later the average Anglo-Saxon possessed of a modicum of literary curiosity begins to speculate about the vie de Bohème. If he has the good fortune to find himself in Paris he will forsake for one day, at any rate, the well-ordered cosmopolitanism of the rue de Rivoli, bent on recapturing something of the flavor of the Boul' Mich'. The expedition is not usually a fruitful one, but the resulting disappointment may be mitigated by a bowl of bouillabaisse, if it happens to be Friday, and a bottle of indifferent red wine at the dingiest restaurant available. How did they live, the Henri Murgers and Little Billees? For they did live both in fact and fancy, and on the whole, making allowances for the rose-colored spectacles of old age, they enjoyed their earthly span. The lucky ones, of course, only passed through Bohemia, but the less brilliant or the less fortunate settled down there for a lifetime. Looking down from the vantage-ground of the twentieth century we wonder how the great company of unsuccessful

authors and painters of the sixties and seventies faced life from one day to another. With a little judicious "booming" and advertising, who knows but they might all have been famous?

Anatole France tells a story of meeting Villiers de l'Isle-Adam during one of his nocturnal rambles and feeling suddenly overcome with pity for the slovenly, ill-kempt, brilliant creature who was deliberately frittering himself away among the riff-raff of the boulevards. But in a moment he realized that his pity was misplaced. Villiers was radiantly happy for he lived in a perpetual dream—one of the most gorgeous dreams that ever transfigured a sordid reality.

When Villiers remarked, "J'ai trop pensé pour daigner agir," he was not indulging in a mere flight of bravado. It was perfectly true. He spent the best part of his life thinking along channels that lead directly away from the tracks of men. Small wonder is it that while his contemporaries only touched Bohemia, and then passed on into the pure, thin air of the Academy, he was left behind, still groping with the magnificent fancies that could never be resolved into print. The visible world, with all its ramifica-

tions of duty and obligation, simply did not exist, as far as he was concerned. If he never experienced the yearning of the normal man to leave his mark behind him, it was because the unseen world was infinitely more vivid. From the moment he set foot in Paris he repudiated the boundaries between this world and the next. Other men have attempted his attitude of serene detachment but they have rarely succeeded. Only Villiers could ask himself with perfect sincerity, "A quoi bon agir pour un instant?"

Jean Marie Mathias Philippe Auguste de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam was born at Saint Brieuc in Brittany on the 7th of November, 1838. His father, the son of an émigré, was an improvident aristocrat who dreamed of restoring the glory of his house by the discovery of buried treasure. He further undertook to recover the property of his more ingenuous friends that had been sequestrated under the Revolution. Needless to say, his pleas were invariably laughed out of court and after enormous trouble and expense his clients became disgusted. No better vindication of Micawber could be found than the Comte de l'Isle-Adam. Something was always turning up, and to the end of his days he imagined that

his strong boxes, full of deeds and testaments, of old charts and records of the Spanish Main, contained the key to the family fortunes. The Comtesse de l'Isle-Adam believed in the genius of her son as she believed in God. Luckily, however, young Auguste was not entirely dependent on the chimerical dreams of his father or the blind idolatry of his mother. "Tante Kerinou" was the deciding factor in his education. Not only did she send him to school at Rennes, but she managed her affairs so shrewdly, much against the advice of her brother, that in 1856 the whole family were able to move to Paris.

It was with high hopes that the mother and father, "Tante Kerinou" and young Auguste, set up housekeeping in the rue Vaugirard. They wandered from one lodgings to another, sometimes living together and sometimes separately, but always bound to each other by the common faith in Villiers' genius. He was about to conquer the literary world. Of his intellectual powers there was no question, and what was even more important, he was the lineal descendant of a maréchal de France and a Grand Master of the Knights of Jerusalem. If any one had hinted that these distinguished ancestors

could not be regarded as very tangible assets Villiers would have felt himself insulted. Their blood flowed in his veins; that in itself was an earnest of success. Like so many men who ignore the opinion of the world, Villiers had his vulnerable spot. For himself he was as nearly as possible impervious to the filth of the gutter, but for his family he was extraordinarily sensitive. When a historical drama was revived in which one of his ancestors was unjustly represented as being in league with the English against Joan of Arc, Villiers appealed to the courts to have the play stopped. His plea failed, but he kept up a running attack on the manager through the columns of the *Figaro*. On another occasion he challenged a man to a duel for daring to consider himself the real descendant of the Grand Master of the Knights of Jerusalem.

Villiers' faith in the saving grace of blue blood is the key to one-half of his work. The pride of "being" and the pride of "becoming," as Arthur Symons puts it, "are the two ultimate contradictions set before every idealist." To Villiers' mind there was no question as to which of the two states was the more desirable. He gloried

in his nobility because it was inherent and beyond the power of man to imitate or to achieve. From this belief naturally followed a contempt for the bourgeois world he saw around him, which found its best expression in that masterpiece of irony, *Tribulat Bonhommet*.

Villiers acknowledged *Tribulat Bonhommet* to be his favorite creation. He intended him to be "l'archétype de son siècle," the greatest Philistine ever conceived of by the mind of man. We see him first as a mighty hunter. Bonhommet has heard that the ermine dies as soon as its whiteness is spotted, so he plans for a wholesale slaughter with buckets of ink. In the same spirit of scientific inquiry he pursues the swan to verify the swan-song legend. In another chapter he is shown as commander-in-chief, urging his troops to die fighting "pour le salut de nos chemins de fer." He is the incarnation of common sense rendered detestable. Villiers not only kept adding fresh chapters to *Tribulat Bonhommet* all his life, but he even sought refuge in personifying him whenever he found himself in unsympathetic surroundings. Sometimes it was persiflage, sometimes it was bitter mockery, but the Bonhommet mood was always one of

contempt for materialism. But Villiers was more than a great satirist. If his high lineage accounted for a certain impatience with the mob it was also responsible for a very real yearning toward perfection. While the one half of him was mocking at the pitiful efforts of society to raise its head out of the welter of materialism, the other half was always ready to acclaim the slightest indications of idealism. In his estimates of other men snobbery played no part. There was only one essential—"qu'on soit atteint d'âme." To be atteint d'âme was to be interested in art and literature, but more than that, it was to be penetrated by a sense of the imponderables.

Some one has defined the symbolist movement in literature as a revolt against the tyranny of fact. Villiers de l'Isle-Adam was more than usually susceptible to this particular form of tyranny, and it is not surprising that he should have gravitated to the group of ardent spirits who had sworn to achieve its downfall. Founding their society in 1866 as a protest against the sterility of nineteenth-century romanticism, the young poets, who modestly christened themselves the Parnassians, welcomed Villiers with

open arms. The cry of art for art's sake was perhaps not as original as they imagined, but that it was a sincere cry cannot be questioned. The faded religiosity of Lamartine, the rococo quality of much of Victor Hugo, and the continuous lovelorn wail of Musset had aroused a spirit of antagonism in the younger poets. Under the leadership of Baudelaire, Leconte de l'Isle, Gautier, and Banville, they decided that the time was come for a poet's emotions to be examined more accurately. Romanticism had sought inspiration in the Orient; that was well enough, but the inspiration had dried up and the Orient had degenerated into a paradise for the conventional. Leconte de l'Isle studied the East afresh, Baudelaire conceived of more subtle sensations for the poet than amorous despair, while the Parnassians one and all devoted their energies to sharpening the outlines of their poems.

In this association for the infusion of backbone into romanticism, for this was really what it was, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam played a prominent part. As a poet he gained little distinction, but as a raconteur and a musician he was unrivalled. François Coppée, himself a Parnas-

sian, testifies to his popularity in the *Revue Fantaisiste*, one of the many short-lived magazines founded by the young Parnassians. He describes Villiers sidling shyly into a room, suddenly being acclaimed by his fellow authors, and made to take the floor. For it was as a talker that he especially excelled. All of the *Contes Cruels* and many of his other books were talked before they were written. That was Villiers' usual method of composition. After he had seen the first effect on an audience he would start to make notes on scraps of paper, and it was these notes, elaborated and corrected to a painful degree of illegibility, that ultimately found their way into the printers' hands. Unfortunately, Villiers' conversational powers were only too well known. Many a short story and many an article signed by boulevard acquaintances must have sounded strangely familiar to him. It was too easy for the loungers in the cafés to divert his stream of ideas into their own pockets. Villiers knew it of course, but he never learned to choose his audience. He dissipated his brilliant conversation with anybody who cared to listen. Let them make money out of him if they would, what did it matter? His

words and his ideas might be stolen, but no one could penetrate into the stronghold of his dreams.

A dreamer and mocker — it is not often that the two types go together — but in Villiers de l'Isle-Adam irony and idealism are continually treading on each other's heels. In *Tribulat Bonhommet* and the *Contes Cruels* the mockery is uppermost, but Villiers is never persistently bitter. Even Bonhommet is offset by the gentle figure of Claire Lenoir, and the tales, satirical as they are, would have been far more savage in the hands of a Swift or a Voltaire. Take, for instance, *Les Trois Filles de Milton* in the volume of *Nouveaux Contes Cruels*. Villiers has seized the pathos of the inspired poet driving his starving daughters to the breaking-point, but he does not subject their misery to the microscope.

"'Mon père, nous sommes là. Nous cherchons à écrire, mais vous allez trop vite, et l'on ne peut suivre. . . . Ce que vous dites cette fois a l'air très bon, je dois l'avouer. . . . Si vous voulez bien recommencer, sans vous emporter ainsi, et parler lentement . . . peut-être. . . . Après un grand silence et un grand fris-

son, Milton répondit a voix basse, avec un soupir: 'Ah, il est trop tard, j'ai oublié.' "

That is all. Villiers' stories are not often as clear-cut as that, though the method is usually the same. The wounds of society are laid open, but there is no sprinkling of acid to make the victim squirm.

To be really embittered an author must be a man of the world, a questionable distinction which Villiers never attained. He was indeed singularly ingenuous. At one time he fully expected to be made King of Greece. In 1862 the throne happened to be vacant and it was rumored in Paris that the choice of the candidate lay with Napoleon III. No princes were supposed to be eligible, but a gentleman of good family was essential. Some of Villiers' friends with a taste for practical joking enlisted the support of the newspapers and a mild campaign was started on his behalf. Villiers needed no further encouragement. He borrowed clean linen and an immaculate frock-coat, and without even waiting for an invitation, called at the Tuileries to present his services to the Emperor. Whether he ever penetrated beyond the Lord

High Chamberlain is not recorded. Probably his eccentric behavior was so alarming to the household that the police were immediately summoned. At any rate, he retired from the Tuileries, and in a few days his last hopes of royalty vanished with the announcement that the Greek National Assembly had elected Prince George of Schleswig-Holstein.

Nor was this little flurry Villiers' only venture into politics. No man could have been more totally unsuited to be a député, but for one wild moment he imagined that he might be elected by the extreme Right as a Catholic and an aristocrat. The clean linen was again borrowed and he even made a few speeches. This time he received something in the nature of a consolation prize by being given the editorship of *La Croix et L'Épée*, a violently monarchical organ which ran for five numbers. After its demise Villiers mingled no more in affairs of state, except through the medium of *Tribulat Bonhommet*, whose opinions on politics and députés became increasingly bitter.

The inherent incapacity to adapt himself to the ways of the world was never more clearly shown than in his efforts to have his plays pro-

duced. In 1875 a prize of 10,000 francs was offered by an American named Michaelis for the best drama on the American Revolution. At the suggestion of his friends Villiers entered the competition, and he was eventually informed that his contribution, *Le Nouveau Monde*, had been awarded the prize. Instead of receiving the 10,000 francs, however, the committee of judges, among them Victor Hugo, told him that he would get only 2,000. Furthermore, his play would not be presented, although immediate production had been expressly stipulated in the terms of the competition. Villiers immediately rushed around to see Victor Hugo and accused him roundly of embezzlement. Then, without waiting for a reply from the old lion himself or from his cohort of admirers, he snatched the manuscript from their hands and took the first train for Bordeaux. The leading theatrical manager in Bordeaux listened to his story with great courtesy and asked him to give a reading of his play. Villiers' cousin, Pontavice de Heussey, by whose good offices the interest of the manager had been secured, observes that the reading was one of the greatest tragedies he ever witnessed. Villiers was tremendously excited.

The manager must get the spirit of the piece before he began to read. With that he proceeded to dash off a few chords on the piano, to hurtle the furniture around the room, explaining all the while the underlying principles of a symbolic drama. "Mais, lisez-le donc," exclaimed the astounded manager. Villiers dropped the manuscript without another word. If his audience were not in sympathy with him from the very start, there was no point in going on with the reading. Finally his cousin read the play, and the manager announced his willingness to produce it, but it was too late. Villiers gathered up his manuscript, refused to discuss the question any further, and returned to Paris.

Le Nouveau Monde was dogged by misfortune. Years afterward it was produced in Paris by a second-rate company with the inevitable result of complete failure. Villiers was not a dramatist, at least not in the nineteenth-century sense of the word. His characters were all incarnations of principles, and he never acquired the knack of making his plays move. Perhaps his best play, *La Révolte*, might have succeeded if it had been presented a few years later as a Scandinavian piece. It suggests the same idea after-

ward so successfully used by Ibsen in *A Doll's House*. Elisabeth, the heroine, after four years of apparently happy married life, decides that the time has come for her to leave her husband, whose devotion to "les affaires" is gradually stultifying her brain. In vain her husband promises to take her to the country two days a week. "Je ne déteste pas la campagne," he declares; "elle inspire des idées fraîches, souvent lucratives." But Elisabeth will have none of his two days in the country. She leaves him, only to come back two hours later, weary, discouraged, and still miserable. This was not the sort of food to appeal to audiences that were being offered at the same time the romantic fervor of Victor Hugo and the light-hearted gaiety of Labiche.

Undoubtedly Villiers' masterpiece was *Axël*, though it was by no means suited to the stage. The mixture of mysticism and romanticism, of beautiful heroines escaping from nunneries, of castles in the middle of dark forests, and heroes dabbling in transcendental philosophy — all this he has poured into the dramatic mould. To be sure, he has not been able to convey all that he has thought, but underlying the twisted thread

of narrative we get the impression of will-power dominating everything else. There is no new doctrine of philosophy in *Axël*, for Villiers' genius did not tend to the systematic development of any one field of thought. As a young man he had steeped himself in the German philosophers, and the clumsy nuggets brought to light by Hegel are reproduced in the beautiful setting of Villiers' yearning idealism. "Pensons et agissons de manière à ce qu'un dieu puisse devenir en nous" — there speaks the true Villiers, no less than in the bitter scoffing of *Tribulat Bonhommet.*

The gleanings from Hegel and Kant, however, do not represent the total of Villiers' debt to Germany. His romantic imagery must have been at least partly inspired by Wagner, whose genius he was one of the first to acclaim, and with whose theories of art he was always in complete sympathy. The two men met in Paris in 1861, while Wagner was struggling over the rehearsals of *Tannhäuser*, which incidentally was later hooted off the stage by the young bloods of the Jockey Club. Villiers, who was much younger, fell under Wagner's spell immediately, and from then on they remained fast friends. It was through Wagner that he tasted the sweets of

something like international recognition. During the festival at Bayreuth in 1879, Villiers gave occasional readings from his books before the Grand Duke of Russia and the King of Bavaria. During one of these readings the audience was so convulsed with laughter that he had to stop for an explanation. It transpired that the likeness between Bonhommet and Liszt, who was also in the audience, was so striking that every one was convinced that Villiers was perpetrating a very subtle caricature.

While the friendship with Wagner accounted for Villiers' success in Germany, some other reason must be found for his gradually increasing popularity in France and Belgium. It is a far cry from the Wagner festival to Thomas Edison, but Villiers' active, ranging mind compassed the gap without any difficulty. His last book, *L'Ève Future*, owed its existence to a chance remark of one of Edison's disciples. A young Englishman had had the misfortune to fall in love with a lady distinguished alike for her beauty and her stupidity. The perpetual contrast between her physical charms and her mental shortcomings preyed upon him to such an extent that he was finally driven to suicide. The

story happened to be told within hearing of an American, who remarked that it was a pity that the distracted lover had not sought the advice of Edison, as he would have been able to invent a creature identical in features and expression and yet infinitely more intelligent. This suggestion so tickled Villiers' fancy that he immediately took it as the theme of a book. His Eve is probably the most ingenious automaton ever conceived in the history of literature. The skin is made of a judicious mixture of liquid ivory and oil of roses. Instead of nerves the scientist supplies her with an admirable system of gold-plated wires. Her thoughts, which she expresses by an internal phonograph, are carefully selected from the classics. There is only one small flaw in her manufacture—her husband, whoever he may be, has to believe in her implicitly. As long as he is able to defend her against the assaults of his own reason the puppet will live and thrive, but as soon as his faith wavers she will fall to pieces. "After all," says Anatole France, "is the idea so very preposterous? For all a man knows about the soul of the woman he loves he might as well marry an automaton as a living creature."

In the end, of course, the mechanical toy crashes to pieces. The future Eve was only a fabrication of the scientists and in the long run, as Villiers says, "la science ne suffit pas." It is no more capable of achieving perfection than flesh and blood. Villiers was always haunted by the idea of perfection in women, just as his father had been haunted by visions of buried treasure. But, while his father remained consistently affable as each new venture plunged him deeper in debt, Villiers became steadily more embittered by the hopelessness of his search. His quest of the ideal woman reminds us of Shelley's earnest interrogation of new-born babies about their pre-natal life. Fatuous it may be, but the world is none the worse for these quixotic attempts to pierce the husk of commonplace. The tragedy, if Villiers' daily disappointment can be dignified by that name, lies in the perpetual clash of childlike ingenuousness and sophisticated cynicism.

And yet the last years of his life were not unhappy. Bohemia is usually intolerant of old or even middle age, but Villiers was spared the neglect that so often awaits the giants of other days. If he never realized his dreams of feminine per-

fection he had the good fortune to meet with one woman, an illiterate sage-femme, who devoted herself to him with complete self-effacement. She followed him from one shabby hotel to another, content to play the part of Martha without aspiring to the understanding of Mary. Eventually a child was born, who became the constant companion of his father. Almost as soon as the boy could walk he and Villiers might be seen of an evening coming down from Montmartre, where the strange ménage was always lodged, to the Café Chateaudun. There among a few intimates, such as Huysmans and Mallarmé, Villiers would pour forth his purple flood of conversation. And there, too, among beer-stained café tables, the little Victor Villiers drank in his first impressions of that clever, thoughtless vie de Bohème which, after acclaiming the father when it was too late, was content to watch the son die of starvation.

It was not an ideal life perhaps, but at any rate it was better than the haphazard existence of the boulevards. Unfortunately, Villiers' health had already begun to give way. Absinthe, lack of sleep, and bad food had eaten away his constitution before the good effects of

domesticity could begin to tell. In the winter of 1888 he was moved to the hospital of Les Frères de St. Jean de Dieu. When it appeared that he was dying the monks whispered to him that it was his duty to his son to remove the taint of illegitimacy. Not much for a man to do on his death-bed, we may think, but for a Villiers de l'Isle-Adam to give his name to a midwife demanded immeasurable self-sacrifice. Quite aside from the question of birth, how strange it must have been for Villiers, who believed supremely in the magical power of words, to be marrying a woman who was unable even to sign her own name. He died on the 19th of August, 1889. Only the day before he had been correcting the proofs of *Axël*. We can imagine him lingering over the superb speech of his hero — half serious, half ironic — "A quoi bon vivre? Les serviteurs feront ça pour nous."

Mr. Carl Sandburg has never been accused of slavish imitation. He may admit the influence of Walt Whitman, but otherwise we gather that he is proud to have eschewed the past. We hear him referred to sometimes as the most autochthonous of contemporary American poets. Not for him the primrose path of Keats and Shelley or the desiccated atmosphere of New England — he sings of delicatessen clerks, of Chicago, "hog butcher of the world," and of slabs from the sunburnt West. Whether he is really more American or only more modern than Longfellow and James Russell Lowell is of no great consequence, but it is interesting to note that it is his vocabulary rather than his ideas that commands our attention. His poetry finds utterance in words that have hitherto been regarded as the more or less exclusive property of essentially unpoetic prose.

Not long ago we came across a passage from Ronsard's *Abrégé d'Art Poétique* which might have been written to vindicate Sandburg's addi-

tions to poetic phraseology. "Je t'ordonne," says Ronsard to the young poets of the sixteenth century, "de fréquenter les artisans de tous mestiers comme de Marine, Vénerie, Fauconnerie, et principalement les artisans de feu, Orfèvres, Fondeurs, Maréschaux, Minérailleurs, et de là tirer mainte belle et vive comparaison avecques les noms propres des mestiers." Probably Carl Sandburg is unconscious of the long arm of Ronsard reaching out through the centuries and directing him in the way he should go. The total rupture with tradition, however, is inconceivably difficult. Theories of poetry strew the ages, and the most iconoclastic of moderns always runs the risk of devoting himself to some creed repudiated by his grandfather as a vulgar error.

This constant straining to break the fetters of tradition is just as evident in French literature of the nineteenth century as in contemporary American letters. The literary radical invariably concentrates his contempt upon his immediate forebears. The further they recede the more innocuous they become. In another generation or two we shall not be surprised if even the New Englanders emerge from the shadows.

So it was with the romantic poets under the ægis of Victor Hugo. They indignantly spurned the pseudo-classic poetry so beloved by their fathers and set out to win their laurels by a direct assault upon feeling. Close upon their heels came the Parnassians, with a different theory of poetry, founded entirely upon form. They were followed by the Symbolists, who, like every literary or political régime in France during the last hundred years, withered under the scorn of the opposition.

In its anxiety to escape the thraldom of eighteenth-century reason and to cater to the insistent demand for novelty, Poetry found its way back to Ronsard. Sainte-Beuve had already called attention to his flexibility, to his variety of metre, and to the essentially musical note in his verse. The great critic pointed the way to the promised land, but he never penetrated into it himself. It was left to his admirer, Théodore de Banville, to recapture the full flower of Ronsard for French poetry. Without surrendering himself to Ronsard's archaic charm Banville emulated his suppleness and his love of words for their own sake. As he was born in 1823, the fashion of celebrating centenaries

would earn him a cursory nod, even if he were not the literary ancestor of a large and ever-growing family. Every man who wrestles with the demon Rhyme in the frantic effort to produce a graceful ballade struggles in the chains forged by Banville. He did not invent the form, to be sure, but he restored it to fashion after it had been lying idle for two hundred years. The learned ladies of the Hôtel de Rambouillet had long ago delighted in the ballade. Unluckily, when the sway of the Précieuses Ridicules was broken by the overpowering common sense of Molière, the ballade had become too much associated with their name to continue an independent existence. English poetry has twice transplanted this measure from France. In the fourteenth century Chaucer borrowed it from Eustache Deschamps, and fifty years ago Swinburne, Lang, and Austin Dobson selected it among other literary wares that were being exhibited by Théodore de Banville as worthy of reimportation.

We are apt, however, to think of Banville too much as a mere master of technique. Certainly he carried to perfection the art of the ballade, the triolet, and the rondeau, but he was not

styled the legislator of the new Parnassians on the strength of these accomplishments. His *Petit Traité de Poésie Française* is the codification of the Parnassian theories of poetry. Anatole France dismissed it summarily as expressing a nightingale's metaphysics, and no doubt Banville's conception of poetry is curiously unintellectual. He staked everything on what he called "richesse implacable de la rime." By richness he meant repetition not only of the vowel but of the supporting consonant. "Breeze" and "freeze," for instance, would be a respectably affluent rhyme, whereas "breeze" and "squeeze" is obviously a poor, poverty-stricken thing. The poet's inspiration must find its vent in such rhymes, and the reader must seek enjoyment in his perception of the ingenuity displayed. Banville also insisted on the importance of utilizing the musical resources of the language by recognizing the sonority of certain words and calculating their æsthetic effect. It is easy to see how Mallarmé, following in his footsteps, arrived at the conclusion that the value of poetry lay more in the sound of words than in their sense. Arthur Rimbaud carried the flag of sensuousness even further by allotting

specific colors to each vowel. He was no doubt convinced that the poor limited creatures who did not see that "i" was red or that "o" was blue were quite incapable of appreciating great poetry.

Banville's poetic theories might well be ignored if they did not happen to go hand in hand with his sense of humor. We have mentioned his connection with the Parnassians. As a young man he wrote a vast amount of statuesque poetry, but in the mythical desert island library which all of us are forever envisaging Banville will be represented by his one volume of *Odes Funambulesques*. In this collection of parody and lyric satire rhyme again plays the leading part. We have nothing in English that quite compares with it. Bergson's philosophic treatise on laughter explains humor as a sudden jerk to the imagination. This definition would seem to fit the average parody, which relies on the constant juxtaposition of the trivial and the sublime. But parody for the most part confines itself to ridiculing an idea, whereas Banville always strives for the double jerk of sense plus sound. He never forgets that he is primarily a lyric poet, and his satire consequently exhibits

his own dexterity more than the absurdities of his victim. Take, for instance, his gentle burlesque of Victor Hugo's poem *Sara la Baigneuse*. Here are the first stanzas of the original and the parody:

"Sara, belle d'indolence,
Se balance
Dans un hamac, au-dessus
Du bassin d'une fontaine
Toute pleine
D'eau puisée a l'Ilissus.

Véron, plein d'insolence,
Se balance,
Aussi ventru qu'un tonneau,
Au-dessus d'un bain de siège,
O Barège,
Plein jusqu'au bord de ton eau."

For "Sara, belle d'indolence," Banville has substituted Véron, the director of the Opéra, whose portly figure would be familiar to most of his readers. The jest is perhaps not one to endure the ravages of time, but we can still appreciate the deftness of the versification. The *Odes Funambulesques* are, unfortunately for the casual reader, stuffed with topical allusions. Banville wrote for the Paris of Gavarni and Balzac, and unless we know that delectable city we

must fall back on the precious prerogative of youth, which, according to Anatole France, differs from old age in its happy capacity for admiration without understanding.

There are, no doubt, people to whom the skill of the tight-rope walker does not appeal. We beg them not to waste their time on Banville's odes. They will only gaze with compassion tinged with wonder upon his feats of equilibrium. That a human being should spend so much time and industry on an accomplishment that at its best is only curious will strike them as incomprehensible. There is no convincing such people; their strongholds of sanity should never even be attacked. The Polar explorer may try to justify himself by feigning a scientific interest in certain obscure currents, but the sympathetic listener knows better. The sheer difficulty of reaching the Pole fascinates him just as the taut wire fascinated Banville, the literary rope-walker. The parallel is not entirely fair to the rope-walker, for he must also create the illusion of extreme facility.

Banville never labors anything. He dances around the bourgeois, his favorite object of satire, darting in occasionally to tweak his nose

without ever tumbling into didacticism on one side or bitterness on the other. He belonged to the generation that made a fetich of despising the commonplace. The bourgeois epitomized normalcy, and Banville, no less than Mr. Mencken, always regarded normalcy as the unpardonable sin. Throughout all his satire runs the unexpected vein of good humor. No one resented his sallies. He could describe the bourgeois at the theatre, his ill-fitting clothes and his inept criticism, without apparently arousing the slightest antipathy. His shafts are barbed, but they are never poisoned. English poetry has no tight-rope artist to match against Théodore de Banville. Locker-Lampson's *London Lyrics* are equally urbane, but they are intentionally sentimental rather than humorous, while Austin Dobson, whose metrical felicity would have fitted him admirably for the task, was irrevocably wedded to the eighteenth century.

Now, to tip the balance, we must admit the obvious limitations of the *Odes Funambulesques*. Even when he would be most serious Banville can never throw off his air of trifling. This growing incapacity to speak from the heart is

still more evident in the *Idylles Prussiennes*, where for the first time the outer world ruthlessly thrusts itself upon his attentions. His raw material consisted of beauty, love, and poetry, out of which he wove exquisite fabrics. Humor was merely incidental. Instead of being, as it usually is, a measure of intellectual depth, Banville's humor was rather a blind to distract attention from the shallowness of his thought. Not understanding realism, either on the stage or in life, he instinctively fought it with the only weapons at his command.

The *Idylles Prussiennes* represent the gallant attempt to laugh in the midst of disaster. While France was plunging from incomprehensible optimism to unplumbed depths of despair Banville's rivulet of satire made its way through the daily papers. The only weapon left to the conquered is irony, and for a workman of his happy nature sustained irony is an unsatisfactory tool. One must be something of a misanthrope, which he never was, to be a great satirist. Try as he will, the fires of contempt do not burn with a hard, gem-like flame. The tragic intensity of a Raemaëkers is never even approached in these rather toothless satires. Like the *Odes Funam-*

bulesques, they are essentially lyrical, and lyric poetry is a bad medium for transmitting hatred. Bismarck and Moltke are substituted for the complacent bourgeois, whom Banville had so often rallied, but now, when he would exchange persiflage for downright castigation, something is lacking. A Voltaire or a Pope can always "without sneering teach the rest to sneer." Banville is too ingenuous; the limpid flow of his stanzas leaves the Prussians singularly unscathed.

One of the most typical of the *Idylles Prussiennes* is *L'Épée*, a poem in which he laments that swordsmanship no longer plays a part in modern warfare. No one will disagree with him, but the picture of Moltke overpowering France by means of a "boîte de géométrie" is, satirically speaking, quite ineffective. It is not surprising that these innocuous war poems made little impression upon the public. Banville had nothing to say that could possibly arrest the national imagination at such a moment. Indeed, if we except the songs of Déroulède, which reduced patriotism to its simplest terms, the Franco-Prussian War was curiously unproductive of popular poetry. Déroulède pointed the

way to national self-respect, while Banville tried to veneer the disaster with a thin coating of academic irony. The contrast between the poetry of 1870 and 1914 is very significant. The poets inspired by the Great War seem to have explored the whole gamut of human emotions except hatred. We do not suggest that they actually accomplished the difficult feat of loving one's enemies, but the expression of animosity did not find its way into their verse. While the cartoonists had their little joke with the Kaiser and Hindenburg, the poets for the most part left them severely alone. The fact is that poetry and international polemics have nothing in common. The satirist may occasionally blunder into the garden of poetry by lampooning his personal enemies, but as soon as he attempts to draw up an indictment against a whole nation he had better confine himself to prose. The gates of poetry have never yet been stormed by a hymn of hate.

We should perhaps consider the Idylles as a form of military service rather than as a contribution to literature. Banville's continual ill-health prevented any active participation in the war, so he goaded the enemy as best he could

with the lash of lyric satire. He was not lacking in the courage of his convictions, as he had previously shown by his defense of Victor Hugo, who was persona decidedly non grata to the Imperial government. An article in the *Figaro* which betrayed an unseemly devotion to the great exile cost him a fine of five hundred francs and fifteen days' imprisonment. The punishment was remitted, owing to the timely birth of the Prince Imperial, an occasion seized upon by Napoleon III for a general amnesty to all petty offenders. A few years later, when he was invited to court to see the performance of *Gringoire*, his only really successful play, Banville must have smiled to remember his narrow escape from the Imperial dungeons. Politics in themselves never attracted his attention, except in so far as they affected literature. During the Second Empire, however, the adventurous man of letters was continually being reminded of the government's existence. The Emperor was painfully sensitive to any impropriety. Consider for a moment the record of censorship for 1857. That year saw the publication of *Madame Bovary*, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, *Les Diaboliques* of Barbey D'Aurevilly, and the *Odes Funambu-*

lesques. Flaubert, D'Aurevilly, and Baudelaire were all haled into court to answer the charge of corrupting public morals. We, who complain of the pernicious activity of Puritanism, should thank whatever gods may be that we have been spared the solicitude of the last of the Bonapartes.

Banville only just escaped the law courts on another charge. Some of his odes came dangerously near poking fun at Imperial dignitaries, but for once common sense came to the rescue of the Empire, and it decided to ignore the antics of a literary clown. Humor is always a dangerous quarry for the hounds of law. It was characteristic of Banville that he rather encouraged the notion that he was only a Pierrot and that beyond a certain skill in rhyming he had no claim upon the attention of his countrymen. In the envoi to the *Ballade sur lui-même* he makes the following profession of his faith:

"Prince, voilà tous mes secrets:
Je ne m'entends qu'à la métrique,
Fils du Dieu qui lance des traits,
Je suis un poéte lyrique."

There was at least one of his contemporaries, however, who refused to accept Banville at his

own valuation. Baudelaire acclaimed him as a classic, and for reasons that are all the more interesting as coming from the author of *Les Fleurs du Mal:* "En pleine atmosphère satanique ou romantique, il a l'audace de chanter la bonté des Dieux et d'être un parfait classique. Je veux que ce mot soit entendu ici dans le sens le plus noble, dans le sens vraiment historique." Surely Baudelaire has here laid his finger on an aspect of classicism that we are inclined to forget. He does not mean, of course, that Banville was a nineteenth-century Pangloss declaring that all was for the best in this best of all possible worlds. Such an opinion, in view of the *Odes Funambulesques*, would be impossible. Banville was classical in his hatred of fanaticism, in his equable temper, and in his unerring workmanship. In one sense, as Baudelaire explained, he was a lonely figure. While his friends deliberately grappled with the powers of darkness, he dallied in the sunshine, but he was caught up by the wave of scientific accuracy just as inevitably as they were. The same spirit that impelled Flaubert to expose Madame Bovary's soul in all its nakedness, that inspired Taine's *First Essays in Criticism and History*, drove Banville

to devote himself to the art of versification. Whatever the social defects of the Second Empire, at least it rallied psychology and erudition to the standard of literature.

Banville would be the first to deprecate an exaggerated estimate of his literary importance. We make no plea for an intensive study of his whole work, as that has already been done in one of those honest flat-footed university theses that somehow contrive to disembowel an author without ever extracting his essence. Posterity has decided that Banville is a minor poet and the judgments of posterity are usually right. His plays, with the possible exception of *Gringoire*, his numerous short stories, without any exception at all, need detain no one but the inquisitive literary student. Even the six volumes of his poetry can be whittled down so as to fit into the average pocket. But on that one volume, comprising the *Odes*, the *Ballades Joyeuses*, the *Rimes Dorées*, and perhaps one or two chapters from the *Souvenirs*, we are prepared to make our stand. The retreat of depreciation shall go no farther. Banville remains the prince of light verse. His kingdom is still flourishing, and it has not been without influ-

ence upon its more imposing neighbors. To cite but a single instance, let us glance for a moment at *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Lovers of Rostand will recall the scene where Cyrano fashions an impromptu ballade as he crosses swords with the Vicomte de Valvert. On the last line of the envoi, he reaches the epitome of panache as he breaks through the Vicomte's guard. Rostand is perhaps rated more highly abroad than at home, but the most rigorous critic would not deny him the gift of metrical agility. There was only one man from whom he could have acquired that particular faculty, and that man was Théodore de Banville.

MARIE LENÉRU

It is not so long ago that the civilized world was startled by the murder of Edith Cavell. What affected men's minds was not so much the travesty of justice and the panic-stricken haste of the executioners as the temper in which Edith Cavell faced the firing party. General von Bissing and his satellites are forgotten, but those prophetic words, "Patriotism is not enough," are still ringing in our ears. Had they been spoken by anybody else the cry of pacifist might have been raised, but coming from one who was about to give her life for England no such easy explanation was possible.

During the war it required a great effort of the imagination to think beyond the ways and means of victory. Many people, indeed, were incapable of this effort, and sank by the wayside babbling about the horror of war and the glory of peace, as if they had suddenly discovered these great truths for themselves. But there were a few others who, without fortifying themselves with propaganda, understood the absolute

necessity of victory and yet realized how inadequate mere victory might be. Among these were Edith Cavell and a young Frenchwoman named Marie Lenéru. Both of them knew that patriotism was not enough.

During the year 1922 a remarkable book of confessions found its way into the salons and bureaux of every book-lover in Paris. It was the *Journal of Marie Lenéru*. We have called it a book of confessions, but Marie Lenéru, were she still alive, would probably strongly object to this description. Confessions immediately suggest Jean Jacques Rousseau or the introspective agonies of Amiel or Marie Bashkirtseff, with whom she has little in common. But confessions they are, nevertheless, though cast in a very different mould from those of her predecessors. Every age produces its own type of autobiography, affording the surest indication of the problems that are troubling men's minds at that particular time. Thomas à Kempis, striving to ignore this world and to fix his attention on the hereafter, illustrates the more thoughtful point of view of the early Middle Ages. The indefatigable Mr. Pepys is par excellence "l'homme moyen sensuel" of the Restoration. Poor

Amiel, possessed with the hopeless incompatibility of thought and action, is the very incarnation of the great enigma of life as the nineteenth century conceived it. And so it is with Marie Lenéru. The two small volumes which comprise the *Journal* are more immediately interesting to us than all the great autobiographies of the past. Her problems are our problems, and in that one pregnant phrase, "Je me résignerai le jour où j'aurai compris," she crystallizes the mental attitude of the twentieth century.

Marie Lenéru was born at Brest in the year 1875. Her father and grandfather were both in the French navy and she was supposed to have inherited their hardy constitution. Unfortunately, a severe attack of measles when she was eleven years old left her stone-deaf and almost blind. Madame Duclaux, one of her devoted friends, tells us that during the bombardments of Paris she could hear nothing. Sometimes she would put her hand on the parapet of the Pont Royal to feel if there was any vibration. Only in this way could she satisfy herself that the Germans were attacking Paris. Her sight was so bad that she could not read the lips, and conversation had to be carried on either by the deaf-

and-dumb language or by laboriously writing out the answer to every question. Under these circumstances Marie Lenéru was cut off from all society, except that of a few intimate friends, and rendered incapable of any direct assistance to her country in its hour of need. There remained only her intellect, and that she devoted to the cause of permanent peace.

La Paix, a dramatization of the problems of peace, written some time before the Armistice, is Marie Lenéru's war work. We are reminded of the Jongleur de Notre Dame, who, having nothing to give to the Virgin, offered her an exhibition of his professional skill. Marie Lenéru could do nothing to relieve the lot of the poilu, so she had recourse to her own métier. As a playwright she had already won the attention of the literary world, and as a playwright she set to work to prevent the recurrence of another war. The possibility of a lasting peace is not exactly a dramatic theme, but, like the Israelites of old, Marie Lenéru has managed to make bricks without straw.

The plot of *La Paix* is only just strong enough to bear the weight of ideas. Lady Mabel Stanley, who has worked for four years in a hospital,

may be described as a militant pacifist. Not for a second does she mean to forget the war and all its attendant horrors. Not for her the doctrine of certain sentimental internationalists that, now that the war is over, we must try to forget about it. On the contrary, she wishes every man, and more especially every woman, to cherish the memory of their sufferings, so that they may work for peace with the same energy and the same self-sacrifice that they displayed in the defense of their country. "Lest we forget" is her watchword, but her inference is the very antithesis of Mr. Kipling's.

In love with Lady Mabel is a French general, whom she refuses on the ground that marriage with a professional soldier would be inconsistent with her principles. So compelling is her example that she influences a young lieutenant, who had thought of passing into the regular army, to resign his commission and thus forfeit the affection of his fiancée. But there is another factor that helps to decide the question for the young lieutenant. He has finally learned the details of his brother's death. He had been killed in the war by a machine-gun bullet — not a quick, painless death, but a lingering torture involving

hours of agony. This incident in the plot is of some importance, as it illustrates Marie Lenéru's particular grievance against war. It is the bodily suffering rather than the economic waste that excites her indignation. She knew from her own bitter experience the terrible handicap of physical disabilities. For once, blindness had given her the clearer vision.

For the rest, *La Paix* suggests no royal road to peace. The Conference should sit in perpetuity and every officer should resign his commission, but until the world rids itself of scepticism peace can never become a reality. Stated thus baldly, it may seem inconceivable that *La Paix* should be theatrically effective. French drama, however, if we except the conventional farce, is less dependent on movement than either the English or American variety. Sacha Guitry's *Pasteur* held an audience spellbound, though completely devoid of action. In the same way, it is the interchange of ideas that constitutes the great merit of all Marie Lenéru's plays. She holds the scales so evenly between the military and the pacifist point of view that we are never for a moment suspicious of any underlying motive of propaganda. *La Paix* was

conceived and written during the last two years of the war. Regarded simply as a prophecy it was a remarkable achievement. Though the author died before the Armistice she had the vision to foresee the end, and the insight into character to understand that the issue would be, not between Germany and the Allies, but between different interpretations of the word "peace." "N'y a-t-il donc pour un pays que l'éternel consentement au martyre?" exclaims Lady Mabel. "Vous posez la question, d'autres la résoudront," replies the General. "Les autres? Mais où sont-ils, ceux qui se passionnent?" There lies, according to Marie Lenéru, the tragedy of the Conference. Men had been willing to lay down their lives for war; they were diffident and apathetic when confronted by peace.

A better play, though to many not more interesting, is *Les Affranchis*. It was Marie Lenéru's first attempt at drama. She sent it with no explanation to Catulle Mendès, who read it hurriedly and forthwith summoned her to Paris with an enthusiastic telegram. The history of *Les Affranchis* reads more like a wonderful fairy-tale than a twentieth-century trans-

action between author and editor. The manuscript was submitted to *La Vie Heureuse* and awarded the prize. In 1911 it was produced at the Odéon, where it scored an immediate success. For an unknown dramatist to make her début at the Odéon, to have all the critics of Paris at her feet — what more can the gods give!

The success of *Les Affranchis* is not hard to understand. The author, to use her own words, "y avait mis quelque chose." The hero, Philippe Alquier, is a great philosopher whose wife has never attempted to keep pace with his ideas. All goes well up to the arrival of his wife's sister, a distinguished abbess. With her is a young girl, Hélène Schlumberger, who is to see something of the world before immuring herself forever in a convent. As in *La Paix*, Mlle. Lenéru contrives to hold the scales extraordinarily even. It would be easy enough to construct the conventional drama of passion around these three figures, enlisting our sympathy in turn with the stodgy wife, the religious ingénue, and the romantic philosopher. But Marie Lenéru was incapable of such banalities. As usual, she was intent on stimulating ideas rather than playing upon the emotions.

Philippe Alquier is not merely a philosopher because he is described as such in the dramatis personæ. He has a definite theory of conduct which is logically maintained throughout the five acts. It is all very well for his secretary to exclaim that his creed is nothing but consistent selfishness decked out in a highly technical vocabulary, but there is more to it than that. Philippe may be only a sophist, but it is rare indeed that the stage produces such plausible sophistry. Listen to him in his great scene with Hélène in the third act:

"Nous nous croyons des devoirs envers ce qui fut, mais ce qui pouvait être et n'aura pas été, l'avenir qu'à chaque heure nous tuons en nous par notre lassitude et notre lâcheté, n'est-ce pas encore un appel désespéré à notre force, à notre scrupule? Ah! tous les possibles qui nous effleurent, nous éventent de leur fuite, qui pouvaient être nous, le plus beau de nous-mêmes, et qui ne seront jamais. . . . Vous êtes la belle, l'unique rencontre de ma vie, la revanche tardive qui peut me résigner à la mort. Au nom de quel idéal et de quelle beauté sacrifierons-nous la plus certaine de nos joies?"

Of course it is the fallacious argument dragged forward in every divorce case, that man has some mysterious inherent right to happiness, but how much more convincing it is than the usual week-kneed surrender to passion! Much of the force of such books as *Anna Karenina* is lost because the characters give themselves up without a struggle, but in *Les Affranchis* Philippe and Hélène never forget that they are human beings and not animals. Their yearning for each other is made infinitely more intense by their consciousness of the forces of morality and intelligence.

And with what exquisite sympathy is traced the figure of Marthe, Philippe Alquier's wife. The fact that her husband and Hélène have not actually sinned is beside the point. She could have forgiven adultery, but this rapprochement, this perfect understanding with another woman, leaves her completely powerless. It is she who has drifted into the position of mistress while Hélène has unconsciously assumed the rôle of wife. There is no easy solution to such a problem, but Marie Lenéru does not attempt to evade the issue. Hélène Schlumberger, the emancipated, is won back by the mother supe-

rior. It might seem that an absolute volte-face were necessary, but the author has wisely not taxed our credulity too far. Hélène capitulates, but she still retains her intellectual freedom. While acknowledging the mastery of the abbess she disdains her efforts at consolation. "Torture me if you like," she exclaims, "you can still do that; but do not attempt to console me." Philippe is powerless against this icy self-control. "Somme-nous des lâches ou des héros?" he demands. The abbess feels that God has won another great victory, but Hélène has no such illusion. "Je ne sais pas," she replies as the curtain falls. Her religious faith has crumbled under the weight of her ordeal, and it is only "the ungirt loin and the untrimmed lamp" that withhold her from the fatal step. Is it indeed cowardice or heroism?

Marie Lenéru wrote several other plays, but she never quite repeated the success of *Les Affranchis*. The *Journal* is full of comments on the drama, which are interesting as showing her attitude toward the stage. She never regarded it as a land of make-believe, but rather as a laboratory where she could pursue her research into human nature undisturbed. The point to which

she keeps recurring in the *Journal* is the importance of so merging characters and ideas that they cannot be dissociated. Nothing annoyed her so much as the splitting up of a play into a series of character studies. Once the cloth was woven, why should the critics attempt to separate the warp from the woof? It was this same conception of unity that prevented Marie Lenéru from ever stooping to mere declamation. She realized that passion must always be inarticulate, and that as soon as people begin talking passion must be subordinated to ideas.

No doubt it was this almost classical admiration for harmony and consistency that inspired her to write the life of Saint-Just. A strange character to select for hero-worship, this repellent young friend of Robespierre, but Marie Lenéru saw something more in him than a bloodthirsty fanatic. Her study of Saint-Just has lately been published in the Cahier Vert series. Maurice Barrès, who has contributed a most interesting introduction, confesses his utter bewilderment on reading the manuscript. How was it possible for this girl, living in Brest, with apparently no access to libraries or original records, to have produced a work of real historical

value? Not only did she have an entirely new point of view about Saint-Just, but she had supported her position with all the scholarship of a trained historian. Unknown to her friends or to her family, she had been in constant communication with the Chambre des Notaires du Nord, who probably imagined that the "M. Lenéru" from whom they received almost daily letters was some dignified old professor. Marie Lenéru was not prepared to accept the common verdict of history that Saint-Just was an ignorant revolutionary with an abnormal thirst for blood. The impression he made on her was quite the reverse. She conceived of him as a product of the eighteenth century, a man cut after the pattern of Montesquieu, with a mania for laws and institutions. "Tu n'es qu'une boîte à apophtegmes," remarked one of his friends angrily, and the shaft does not fly wide of the mark. He was a sententious creature, but gifted at the same time with indomitable energy. It was certainly not by mere apophthegms that he cleared French soil of the Allied armies in 1793. We imagine that it was his stark tenacity of purpose that appealed to the spirit of Marie Lenéru. "Ce qui distingue

l'esprit de Saint-Just est l'audace. C'est lui qui a dit le premier que le succès de la Révolution était dans le mot osez." It is not so surprising, after all, that the woman who had to fight so hard merely to keep in touch with the world around her should have been captivated by the young Jacobin who was always daring and achieving the impossible.

Perhaps it is one of the compensations of bad health that the great invalids in history are granted a more than usual allowance of self-confidence. Stevenson says that there are times when he thinks he could command armies like Hannibal and write plays like Shakespeare. In Marie Lenéru's *Journal* we find an entry to much the same effect: "Je n'ai jamais lu d'une action dont je ne me suis sentie capable." Compare this with Amiel's "I have never felt any inward assurance of genius, or any presentiment of glory or happiness," and the different character of the two *Journals* is at once apparent. Marie Lenéru found a tremendous zest in life. Blind and deaf as she was, she wanted above all things to do the season in Rome or Paris, to meet interesting people, and to "drink delight of battle with her peers." There was nothing

snobbish or even précieuse about these longings. Indeed, the charm of Marie Lenéru is her consistent ingenuousness. The eternal feminine was never sacrificed on the altar of literary ambition. "J'aimerai toujours mieux être inimitable par la manière de porter une robe de Chevert que par tout le talent et toute la laideur des Eliot et des Staël." How delightfully natural that is, and we can well believe it when we look at the charming frontispiece to the *Journal.*

There have been so many records preserved of precocious children that it is a relief to find that the editor has decided not to publish the earlier part of the *Journal.* What we have is a very well-chosen selection covering the period from 1893, when she was eighteen years old, to her death in 1918. The abiding impression is of the richness of the author's personality. It would be impossible to label the *Journal* as containing the reflections of a gallant invalid, of an aristocrat, or of a socialist. Marie Lenéru is too elusive for any such simple classification. She can be an ardent romantic and a dispassionate realist before we are aware of the change. Listen to this scrap of conversation with her

mother: "J'aimerais mieux m'être trompée sur la fidélité de mon mari que sur ses facultés et sa valeur en soi. Fernande était merveilleusement de mon avis. Maman disait: 'Vous êtes dégoûtantes!'" How typical that is of the older and younger generation — youth serenely condemning the foundations that old age has been at such pains to construct!

Of course, much of the *Journal* is in a more sombre mood. As a child Marie Lenéru was subject to long fits of introspection. She was preoccupied with morality, reading and rereading Vauvenargues and La Rochefoucauld as many as ten times, but even as a child she would never give way to despondency. Madame Duclaux, to whom the *Journal* contains so many charming references, has told the present writer that it was difficult to believe that the introspective diarist and the light-hearted young woman in love with Paris and the world were one and the same person. But Marie Lenéru, although she was born in 1875 and died in 1918, was a child of the twentieth century and an heir to all its complexities. Born fifty or a hundred years earlier she would have been content to lead a life of study, revelling in the satisfaction of a

purely intellectual existence. Instead of which she admits to a very mundane desire for more money and more clothes and a more interesting milieu. She looked upon her writing as upon Swedish exercises, that give you a comfortable glow of health and keep the muscles supple. No one but a fool regards gymnastics as an end in themselves, and no one with the exuberance of Marie Lenéru could accept literature as a substitute for life.

The *Journal* abounds in references to her reading: in English literature Charlotte Brontë, Shelley, and Meredith, and "pour la grosse artillerie," as she puts it, Darwin's *Origin of Species*. In her own language, as so often happens, her tastes were not as catholic. She finds Paul Bourget interesting but superficial, always starting hares and never running them down. On the other hand, Zola, who certainly never suggested anything that he failed to follow up, is accused of going round and round in a circle. With him "c'est toujours le même livre, la même description, la même sensation." Furthermore, Zola, busy and active as he was, had never lived. He remained essentially provincial. Such a charge cannot be brought against Victor Hugo,

whose vitality might well have appealed to Marie Lenéru, but she dismisses Victor Hugo's fifty-odd volumes even more peremptorily as being so much rubbish.

Perhaps it is hardly fair to take these random opinions scattered throughout the *Journal* too seriously, but Marie Lenéru's criticism, arbitrary as it may be, is never merely capricious. Although she spent much of her time alone, her defective sight prevented her from being an omnivorous reader. Upon whatever she did read she brought the full weight of her intelligence to bear, and her standard of excellence, however eccentric, was always rigorously applied. She admired intensely — and here no one will be inclined to cavil with her opinion — the poetry of the Comtesse de Noailles. Why was it that certain other modern poetesses could not attain her level? "Parce qu'elles ne repensent pas ce qu'elles voient." The phrase is worth pondering because it contains the clue to Marie Lenéru's own work. She was the very opposite of the successful journalist, who observes everything and selects the most palatable details for publication. There was a great deal that poor Marie never saw, but whatever floated within

her vision was pounced upon and subjected to the fierce heat of her intelligence, until in some way it became a part of herself. By dint of chewing the cud of old scraps of conversation with her mother and her friends, *Les Affranchis* came to be written. The critics wondered how this young woman from Brest could probe so deftly into the human heart. What could she know of the world? Seventy-five years ago Charlotte Brontë was exciting the same wonder. A public increasingly dependent on newspapers, special correspondents, and eye-witnesses finds it hard to realize that intelligence operating by itself often commands a wider field than a host of trained observers. Henry James used to say that he rewrote mentally every novel he read, and in the same way Marie Lenéru lived over again everything she saw or heard.

The *Journal* contains a great deal besides literary criticism. Here and there we catch glimpses of the life at Brest, her occasional impatience at its monotony, and the annual excitement over the trip to Paris. Of autobiography, however, there is not much. It is essentially a journal, and a journal of ideas rather than emotions. One may say that the dominant motive

in Marie Bashkirtseff is the passion for fame. From the beginning to the end of her short life she wanted to be remembered by posterity. It is a legitimate but a wearisome aspiration because it is incapable of any particular development. Marie Lenéru was eager to drink life to the lees, and to make the most of the intelligence that God had given her, but she never worried about her niche in the hall of fame. Like Browning, it was the effort that concerned her rather than the achievement. Perhaps she inherited the quality of self-reliance from her seafaring ancestors. As a child she had been taken to Lourdes, and the failure of the anxiously awaited cure made a deep impression upon her. There was a moment of passing bitterness. "J'aurai beau prier, je ne pourrai plus être heureuse comme une autre." The next instant her natural resiliency came to the rescue. Marie Lenéru never resigned herself to anything. Just as the twentieth century refuses to swallow many of the previously accepted theories of education and government, so she refused to bow her head to any adversity. She indignantly repudiated the theory that war was an inevitably recurrent evil with the same exuberance that she

repudiated the handicap of her own disabilities. There is no inertia in the world that cannot be overcome by the force of intelligence. That is the stimulating creed embodied in the pages of her *Journal*. If it leads to occasionally hasty criticism and sweeping generalizations, it is, at any rate, free from the canker of abortive introspection. No one who keeps a diary can avoid the examination of self, but Marie Lenéru has set a new standard by holding up the mirror to her intellect rather than to her emotions.

As always, it is interesting to speculate what effect a few more years would have had upon her genius. The war had matured her, as it did all thoughtful people, but she was not destined to see the end. The air-raids on Paris had driven her very reluctantly back to Brittany, where she succumbed to an epidemic of influenza. She died at Lorient in September, 1918, "toujours souriante, sans un regret." We have ventured to couple her name with that of Edith Cavell because, in spite of their widely different spheres, they had certain rare qualities in common. Both were passionately patriotic and both were devoid of the narrowly national outlook that so often accompanies patriotism. They

knew that sheer gallantry, even when aided and abetted by diplomacy, could never remake the map of Europe. They were both rebels in the best sense of the word — rebels, devoted to their respective countries, who yet never allowed the longing for victory to usurp the place of conscience or intellect.

SACHA GUITRY

It has become a commonplace with those who knew Paris during the war that she was never so attractive. For four years the cosmopolitan riff-raff that descended after the Armistice like a plague of locusts was kept at a respectful distance. The German spy may have surmounted the barrier of red tape that protected Paris, but the ordinary globe-trotter was more easily discouraged. The prospect of long hours in consular offices before he could gain a footing in the promised land was sufficient to quench his ardor, especially when he remembered that the modern equivalents of milk and honey were rigidly banned after 9 P. M. A Parisian Paris is something that we shall never see again. It will not be easy to convey its peculiar charm to the next generation. Newspapers that took four pages to tell you nothing instead of forty, elusive taxis that when caught would only go to Clichy, a strange district inhabited exclusively by chauffeurs, long-expected hot baths that were

usually cold, because "as monsieur knows, il n'y a pas de charbon" — these things in themselves are not particularly romantic, but we like to dwell on them, as they were all part of the three days' Paris leave.

We have always thought that Pippa would have done well to conclude her one day's holiday in the year with an evening at the theatre. With this in mind we consulted the concierge, who almost automatically suggested the Folies-Bergères. Gentlemen on leave always went to the Folies-Bergères; it was the recognized antidote to war-weariness. Now, the original English pony-ballet, which has grown old in the service of that theatre, is justly celebrated for the precision of its drill, but military evolutions on the stage are apt to pall after the first few minutes. We bear no ill-will to the concierge. He had, no doubt, done his best, but the responsibility for our own entertainment could not again be delegated.

We finally decided upon a play being given at the Bouffes-Parisiens, entitled *L'Illusioniste*, a comedy written and acted by Sacha Guitry. A French actor-manager invariably challenges comparison with Molière, just as every lieu-

tenant of artillery in the French army who happens to be a Corsican invites a parallel with Napoleon. We had heard of Lucien Guitry, who created the rôle of Chantecler. What could be more inviting than a comedy by the son of the greatest actor in France, who was himself familiarly spoken of as the twentieth-century Molière?

L'Illusioniste has never been produced in America. Like all Guitry's plays, it is a tour de force constantly on the verge of breaking down and always redeemed by his incomparable cleverness. The hero is a conjurer whose tricks excite the attention of a lady in the stage-box. During the entr'acte the lady arranges with the conjurer that he shall come to her soirée after the theatre and entertain her guests. With a little skilful manœuvring the soirée boils down to a tête-à-tête between herself and the conjurer. These are the scenes in which Sacha Guitry excels. Two characters brought together anyhow, knowing nothing of each other's antecedents, find themselves seriously discussing the advisability of eloping together. There is nothing of the conventional French farce in all this. In his earlier plays, such as *La Prise de Berg-op*

Zoom and *Petite Hollande*, men and women ran away with each other's husbands, mistresses, or wives with the most disgraceful gusto. In *L'Illusioniste* the protagonists talk about running away together humorously, passionately, and romantically, but they never do it. "On ne badine pas avec l'amour" may have been the experience of Alfred de Musset, but Sacha Guitry's characters are nimbler or at least thicker-skinned. They play with fire and they never get hurt.

The illusionist is well-named, for he conjures with ideas even more deftly than with rabbits and silk handkerchiefs. At midnight he can make his profession glow with such romance that his hostess fairly palpitates with eagerness to share its glories with him. The following morning he is no less successful in painting the drab discomfort of the perpetual one-night stands. It is all an illusion, and instead of being broken-hearted they part the best of friends. With anybody but Guitry such a plot would inevitably collapse. Indeed, in this particular piece he is indispensable both as actor and author. No one else could glide over such thin ice with the necessary confidence. Another ac-

tor would be tempted to put too much flesh and blood into the part, which would be fatal to all verisimilitude. The very essence of Sacha Guitry's comedy is that his characters are all silhouettes. We never remember their names. Unlike Molière or even Labiche, he has created no types. No bourgeois gentilhomme, no Monsieur Perrichon will survive as a solid enduring monument to his comic genius.

This is unfortunate, but, granted Guitry's lightness of touch, it is inevitable. He never insists on anything, his situation is indicated by a gesture, an exchange of glances, or an almost inaudible exclamation. The next minute, while the audience is still licking its chops, he is off on another tangent. So anxious is he not to labor the point that he deliberately foregoes opportunities for a humorous climax that would be pounced upon by other dramatists. M. Guitry, however, is blessed with such an extraordinary power of improvisation that he can afford not to husband his resources. Why should he make the most of one little jest, when there are a hundred more tumbling over themselves clamoring to be born. If his predecessors have created full-blooded mortals while he has been satisfied

with shadows, it is because they relied on emphasis rather than suggestion. Molière's pompous doctors, Shakespeare's shallow justices, the quick-witted slaves of Plautus and Terence — the humor of these characters is always the result of conscious exaggeration. We like to linger over their absurdities, whereas when M. Guitry has us in tow no dawdling is allowed. He has that "diable au corps," both as actor and author, that keeps us panting along behind him until the end of the performance.

There is still another reason for the lack of substantiality in his characters. They have no ballast, no undercurrent of mute bitterness, such as we find so often in Molière or Aristophanes. The sympathetic or humorous hero in the Guitry comedy is never the victim. If there is any victimizing to be done he does it, for the hero is always Sacha Guitry himself, whether he be actually in the cast or not, and no imagination can conceive of his wit ever being worsted.

The dramatist who acts his own plays, for we insist that Sacha Guitry should be considered primarily as a dramatist, has certain very definite advantages. Presumably he knows the idiosyncrasies of the average audience, and he

can capitalize that knowledge to considerable effect. M. Guitry has been brought up in the theatre. His first play, *Nono*, which he revived in London two years ago, was written at the age of sixteen. Before he was twenty one of his comedies was being acted at the Odéon. His wife, Yvonne Printemps, is a talented actress, and his father is the doyen of the French stage. No wonder then that he has a theatrical sixth sense. He knows, perhaps a little too well, what the public wants. To come home from the theatre, to work on a new play while the plaudits of the crowd are still ringing in your ears must be an intoxicating sensation. We can understand how M. Guitry prefers to write before the atmosphere of the stage has evaporated. Undoubtedly it puts him into closer contact with his audience, but is this always desirable? Most dramatists have to remember to keep one eye on the audience, but Sacha Guitry only gives us his best when he forgets their existence. When he fails, or rather when he offers us vaudeville instead of drama, for he never fails, the fault lies with his uncanny facility. He gives us the clue to his own weakness in that wonderful last speech of Deburau, where the great

Pierrot is coaching his son to take his place. Speaking of the audience, he says:

"Il faut très peu de chose en somme pour lui plaire!
Il faut, tu vas voir, c'est un rien,
Il faut que sans effort il te comprenne bien!
Fais-toi comprendre et ça suffit."

Admitting that the great comic characters in drama and fiction are not distinguished by their subtlety, the author who banks too much on the public readiness to be amused runs the risk of being applauded and forgotten almost simultaneously.

Possibly Sacha Guitry realizes that it is too easy for him to make people laugh, for beginning with *Deburau*, we get the impression that he has at last found a subject that requires spade-work. Nothing, of course, is so painful to read as laborious writing, but we like to feel that the author has overcome difficulties. The verse that reads too smoothly puts us to sleep. It may be brutal, but we expect the masterpiece that staggers our imagination to have cost the author a few hours in purgatory. *Deburau* represents Sacha Guitry's highwater mark. In this play he has touched emotions undreamed of in his earlier comedies and, furthermore, he has

created a world peopled by human beings instead of shadows.

Jean-Gaspard Deburau was the leading light of the Théâtre des Funambules, of which all our so-called intimate theatres are lineal descendants. The aim of the management to break down the barrier between actor and audience sounds strangely familiar to our ears. For this purpose Deburau was the ideal man. All literary Paris knew him, and he was as popular with the baker and the grocer around the corner in the Boulevard du Temple as he was with Victor Hugo or Théophile Gautier. The Funambules was perhaps an unconscious protest against the all-prevalent romantic drama. The spectators were near enough to exchange quips with the actors and to cheer the efforts of the solitary scene-shifter who managed the various backdrops single-handed.

Guitry has contrived to recapture the flavor of the old playhouse and crystallize it in the person of Deburau. He is the typical actor of literature, romantic, conceited, comic, and pathetic all at the same time. Love of his profession overpowers every other instinct. After years of domestic happiness he falls in love with

another woman, who jilts him without a moment's hesitation. When he returns home he finds that his wife had pined for a few days and then eloped with a jeweller. We shall never forget the supreme contempt which Guitry poured into that one word, "bijoutier." The wife of Deburau, the greatest Pierrot in France, consoling herself with a jeweller — it was inconceivable. Meanwhile he has given up the stage and sits at home sick at heart, waiting for the day when his mistress will come back to him. Finally she returns for one last visit bringing a doctor with her who urges him to go out and amuse himself. He should go to the Funambules says the doctor, and see the great comedian Deburau. That settles it; he will go back to the stage. The manager is delighted until he comes on in his favorite rôle of "marchand d'habits" and it appears that he has lost his cunning. The Pierrot who had been able to express everything by a gesture can now only gape at the audience helplessly. We have already referred to the famous scene where, conscious that he can never recover the lost art for himself, he imparts the secret as best he can to his son, longing for him to succeed and yet jealous

lest he should outshine his father. In this scene and, indeed, throughout the play Guitry achieves that delectable blend of humor and romance which has become the hall-mark of his later comedies. The historical drama has always been popular in France, but there is no other dramatist who writes so wistfully and yet so unsentimentally of the past. Only Guitry could keep Deburau from becoming absurd. Caricature would have killed him and the temptation to caricature must have been very strong. After all, Deburau had a creed of his own and it was more applicable than the teachings of most philosophers. "L'Amour et le Travail" were his two lode-stars. It was not an easy task to present him to the public in such a way that they should accept him without a snicker.

Undoubtedly the verse helped to give just that touch of romance that the play needed. Guitry called it a "comédie en vers libres," which means, of course, not free verse as we understand it but a marvellously supple use of rhymed couplets. We hear a good deal in these days about the shackles of rhyme. Guitry carries his fetters with the most perfect ease, as if he would disprove once for all the average for-

eigner's conviction that a French play in verse is a stilted and a lifeless thing. The rhymes come tumbling over each other in long, steady waves, and again like the foaming waters of a brook in flood, never mechanical and never too obviously artful. It is a great feat of versification. After the facile comedies of his earlier days, what a relief to find M. Guitry treating his muse in not quite so cavalier a fashion.

After the success of *Deburau*, which no one interested in the theatre could afford to ignore, Lucien Guitry paid his son the compliment of asking him for a play. Up till now father and son had gone their separate ways. Lucien was a great actor, Sacha an ingenious playwright with a gift for writing comedies in which he and Yvonne Printemps amused themselves hugely and incidentally captivated the public.

The life of Pasteur which he chose to dramatize for his father is utterly unlike any of his other plays. It was acted recently in New York, and we are not surprised that it failed. Without Lucien Guitry in the title rôle, and without a more or less intimate knowledge of the biography of Pasteur by Vallery Radot, the play is undeniably somewhat arid. There are no

women in the cast and from a dramatic point of view there is no climax. Drinkwater has accustomed us to a modern variety of the historical play which consists of isolated scenes from the life of a great man, but the appeal of such a play inevitably depends on our knowledge of the great man. Perhaps when education is entirely reformed bacteriologists will loom as large across the pages of our history books as statesmen or generals, but we have not yet reached that stage of evolution. Granted a good actor, *Abraham Lincoln* almost had to succeed because every one was anxious to see how the gigantic personality of Lincoln could be fitted on to the stage. The appeal of *Pasteur* was far less universal. Even in France, although a new postage-stamp has lately been engraved in his honor, there is no Pasteur legend. Sacha Guitry faced a terrific task when he undertook to dramatize a figure who has not bitten into the national imagination. The pros and cons of spontaneous generation are pretty poor grist for the dramatic mill. Almost equally poor is sheer nobility of character, unless it can be shown affecting the actions of other men. Nevertheless, *Pasteur* as produced at the Théâtre de Vaudeville in January,

1919, was a very great performance. Whether the chief honors go to Lucien or to Sacha is of no importance. We may call it a family triumph. For the first time an illusion of greatness was created on the stage, not by an actor playing certain scenes which have since become famous, but by his literally assuming the dominant personality of the character he represented. Any one who has tried his hand at fiction knows how easy it is to conceive of sparkling heroines. Unfortunately the sparkle almost invariably wears off when we transfer these dazzling creatures from brain to paper. History offers the amateur author any number of ready-made heroes and heroines, all suffering from the same limitations. They do the most dramatic things of themselves, but they refuse to be witty or noble or interesting until the author makes them so. The Guitrys never tell us that Pasteur was a great man. Many of his best-known achievements are not even mentioned, and yet when the curtain drops on the last act, as Pasteur is being escorted into the Sorbonne, we know, however slight our knowledge of his career, that we have spent the evening with a very great man.

That the dramatization of Pasteur's life ap-

pealed to Guitry is not surprising. If it succeeded it would be a tour de force, and the man who has made a reputation for light comedies naturally yearned to startle the public with something entirely different. *Pasteur* is intensely serious. There is no comic relief, and we cannot but sympathize with the American doughboy who went to the Théâtre de Vaudeville and wondered, if that was vaudeville, what the serious French drama could be like. Yet, different as it is, we could recognize *Pasteur* as a blood brother of *Deburau*. In *Deburau* M. Guitry was edging away from comedy into romance. In *Pasteur* he has shown us, and the portrait is abundantly convincing, a romantic scientist — romantic, that is to say, in his hatred of pedantry and in his capacity for seeing infinitely beyond the immediate consequences of his research. Romance always recoils from an exclusively technical consideration of a subject. Every discovery that Pasteur made was the result of dreaming, of conceiving of the world as it might be instead of as it was. Guitry has caught this trait to perfection in the scene where the little boy is brought to him from Alsace to be inoculated against hydrophobia. It was the

first test he had had and all the doubts and objections of his critics swept over him again. His love of children, his realization that the fate of thousands of others was involved, almost overpowers him. Again, when he sees the child three years later, now perfectly healthy, his tenderness wells up to the surface. We wondered what it was that set the most sophisticated audience of the world snuffling behind their programmes. Was it Lucien, or Sacha, or the spirit of Pasteur himself? Whatever it was, the acting of Lucien Guitry was a lesson in economy of means. There was no stage business, no telling speech to fall back upon — nothing to compel sympathy but his own personality. Evidently Sacha Guitry knew what he was doing when he dramatized Pasteur for his father. It was the severest test an actor could have. Hereafter we shall have our champion to launch into the discussion when the older generation tries to cow us into submission with talk of Booth and the Sarah Bernhardt of the eighties.

The rarefied air of *Pasteur* no doubt necessitated an after-cure, for in the piece that succeeded it, *Le Mari, la Femme, et l'Amant*, M. Guitry turned back for another bout with the

world, the flesh, and the devil. We can imagine no better illustration than this twentieth-century Restoration drama of Burke's questionable aphorism, that vice loses half its evil by losing all its grossness.

The next serious venture was even more of a family affair. Long before the production of *Pasteur*, the gossip of the boulevards had it that father and son had quarrelled. The announcement that *Pasteur* would be followed by a new play in which the two Guitrys and Yvonne Printemps would be seen together was of itself sufficiently interesting. The title of the play, *Mon Père Avait Raison*, was even more intriguing. If the public hoped that Sacha Guitry would expatiate on family differences of opinion, they were doomed to disappointment. *Mon Père Avait Raison* disclosed no secrets. To say that it was a clever comedy is to repeat in other words that it was written by Guitry, but its cleverness added nothing to the author's stature. He was merely exploring familiar country.

Perhaps it was only intended as a stop-gap, for hard upon its heels came a play about the poet Béranger, theoretically as undramatic a theme as Pasteur, but enlivened with the cut

and thrust of repartee that recalls Congreve at his best. Just as in *Pasteur* M. Guitry undertook to display his conception of the ideal man of science, so in *Béranger* he introduces us to the ideal man of letters. Again regardless of the usual prejudice in favor of action, he concentrates his energies on focussing the poet, and merely sketches in a suggestion of drama as an afterthought. Were it not for the rapier-like dialogue between the hero and Talleyrand, *Béranger* might be rewritten as an essay in appreciation. The instinctive reaction to these "essay-dramas" is not, "Is it a good play" but "Is it a true picture?" No one objected when Dumas or Rostand put history in fancy dress, for that was part of the game. The play was the thing and history was lucky to be allowed a part at all. We are more critical now. Shakespeare would have a hard time to-day in explaining that seacoast in Bohemia or Portia's extraordinary system of jurisprudence. *Pasteur* was rigidly faithful to fact. Whatever it lacked in theatrical appeal it made up by its unflinching honesty. *Béranger*, however, falls between two stools. A man must be something more than a popular poet if he is to dominate a play without

any support from the plot. M. Guitry's fertile invention could easily have provided him with a dramatic framework, but we suspect his heart was set on creating a companion-piece to *Pasteur*. To project upon the stage the nobility of letters as he had the nobility of science would have rounded off a piece of work already acclaimed as unique.

Unfortunately Béranger, delightful as he is, was not the right man of letters for this purpose. The scientist can perhaps be more easily detached from history than the poet, especially when, as in the case of Béranger, the poet reflects the passing emotions of his contemporaries. We follow him from his birth, just before the French Revolution, through the halcyon days when his songs were on everybody's lips, down to his obscure old age when he was universally forgotten. The author would have us believe that Béranger was temperamentally if not actually the ideal poet. He has a fine contempt for politics and the ways of the world. Without being in any way a Don Juan, he advocates philandering as the only worthy occupation for a young man. To love one's country and to love one's mistresses are the poet's two cardinal prin-

ciples. This thesis is defended with extraordinary ingenuity. Before the end of the second act we all want to live in Béranger's world, to champion lost causes, to insult scheming politicians, and to make love to innumerable Lisettes and Madeleines. Our only objection to this charming character is that he is not arresting enough to carry the whole weight of the play upon his shoulders. M. Guitry leaves him dangling in the air, whereas he needs a substantial background if he is to show to the best advantage. Only when Talleyrand appears does he get the support he deserves. The eternal quarrel between the artist and the man of the world extends M. Guitry's wit to its full capacity. Talleyrand in Béranger's eyes is a super-traitor and nothing more. He had betrayed in turn his church, his Emperor, and his King. "I have never conspired," replied Talleyrand, "until I had half France for an accomplice." The pity of it is they were both right. Béranger was always backing the wrong horse. When Napoleon was at the height of his power he chose to sing of the golden days of the "roi d'Yvetot," and when the roi d'Yvetot, in the unromantic person of Louis XVIII, came into his own again

he harked back to the glories of the First Empire. As for the young doctrinaires who chattered vapidly about socialism, Béranger had no patience with them. When he was their age he made love and wrote simple little verses that spread through France like wild-fire. He would go to jail rather than sell himself to Talleyrand, but he cared nothing for the business of politics. The man of letters and the man of science, Béranger and Pasteur, had one trait in common — a contempt for the "recherche stérile de la meilleure forme de gouvernement."

Such is M. Guitry's Béranger, and, attractive as he is, we feel that he has been oversentimentalized. A too intimate knowledge of the theatre from the actor's point of view has again intervened between the dramatist and his public. While Béranger scores with every speech he makes, the play as a whole suffers from inanition. There are no worlds for this perfect theatrical hero to conquer. M. Guitry is still young and the present remarkable output may last for years. Lope de Vega has several hundred plays to his credit, and we see no reason why Sacha Guitry should not rival this total. Rémy de Gourmont says that the theatre is in-

variably the most national thing about a literature, because it is the most material and the most physical. Guitry's plays are eminently material, and, like all material things, they run the risk of disappearing without leaving a trace behind them. It sounds paradoxical, but the apparently ephemeral lyric is more likely to endure than many a substantial drama, for the drama too often deals only with the particular, which loses its hold on the next generation. Where M. Guitry is most obviously timely we look to see him soonest forgotten, but fortunately he has written much that is not merely timely. The high seriousness of *Pasteur*, the humorous pathos of *Deburau*, and the brilliant nonsense of the comedies represent a cross-section of France. Without attempting to estimate its importance, let us recognize that the Guitry drama at its best is as racy, as illuminating of the national character, as the comedy of Molière himself.

"Le moindre petit livre qui inspire une idée poétique, qui suggère un beau sentiment, qui remue l'âme enfin, vaut infiniment mieux, pour l'enfance et pour la jeunesse, que tous vos bouquins bourrés de notions mécaniques."

We quote this extract from *Le Livre de Mon Ami*, by Anatole France, for the benefit of those parents who must hang their heads in shame when called upon by an inquiring progeny to explain the mechanism of the telephone, or the rotation of wheels, or any of the baffling questions to which the modern child, according to current advertising, demands an immediate answer. Somehow we have always fought shy of those handy encyclopædias which are guaranteed to get the parent out of every bunker of ignorance. If we are suddenly asked where the wind comes from we shall surrender without firing a shot. Some grown-ups may bluff it out until the child graduates from kindergarten, but the inevitable débâcle will be all the more ignominious. The bubble of parental omniscience

must burst sooner or later and we prefer that the child should make his appalling discovery at an early age.

The apostles of science are so insistent that we are glad to find that a whole-hearted devotion to mechanics is not the sine qua non of an intelligent child. Anatole France is ready enough to admit the romance of the material world, but he denies most emphatically the virtue of scrapping fairy-stories in favor of the first popular handbook on science. In the four books dealing with his childhood — *Le Livre de Mon Ami*, *Pierre Nozière*, *Le Petit Pierre*, and *La Vie en Fleur* — he comes back again and again to the necessity of escaping from one's environment. "Le rêve, plus que le rire, distingue l'homme des animaux et établit sa supériorité." The fairy-story exists because it satisfies the yearnings of the childish imagination more adequately than the most ingenious explanation of natural phenomena. We can readily imagine M. France, the arch scoffer of his generation, leaping to his feet in answer to Peter Pan's appeal, "Do you believe in fairies?" Of course he believes in fairies, or in any other figment of the imagination. A man who has spent his en-

tire childhood day-dreaming along the quays of Paris is going to think twice before renouncing the accumulated reveries of twenty years. Whenever an assault is made upon his intellect Anatole France instinctively squares off, but he is proud to leave the road to his feelings unguarded.

In *Le Livre de Mon Ami*, published in 1885, he guided his readers for the first time through the maze of childhood. The three sequels only suffice to carry him through school, so that the whole autobiography covers less than a quarter of his life. Perhaps M. France originally set forth with a more ambitious programme, but if so he soon found himself entangled in the meshes of his youth. We are glad to have it that way. "Give us a child till he is six," say the Jesuits, "we care not who has him afterward." So it is with a man's biography. If he will only tell the story of childhood himself we care not what literary hack takes up the burden of his maturity. Anatole France Thibault — the surname was dropped at an early age — was born in 1844, the only son of a rather unsuccessful bookseller. Monsieur Thibault appears in the autobiography as Doctor Nozière,

partly because his son thought he should have been a doctor, and also because it amuses him to cast a more or less transparent veil of fiction over all his reminiscences. His mother in spite of her devotion seems to have misunderstood him pretty consistently. Had she belonged to this generation she might have benefited by a more accurate knowledge of children's psychology. As it was, he grew up at arm's length from both parents, and being an only child he was forced back on the society of his nurse and the resources of his imagination. Whatever may be said about the loneliness of an only child, Nature, in some cases at least, comes to the rescue. We have all heard of Stevenson's genius for playing alone; Anatole France was no less inventive. Nowadays children are herded together and taught how to play, but in the Paris of the eighteen-fifties there were few playgrounds and no masterful athletic directors.

With his nurse Mélanie, the "bonne à tout faire," for the Thibault family lived on a small scale, he would sally forth every morning from the Quai Malaquais in quest of adventure. Though they went regularly either to the Tuileries or the Luxembourg Gardens, Pierre Nozière,

alias Anatole France, would have scorned the imputation of monotony. Were there not always the print-shop windows and the perpetual novelty of Guignol? Mélanie herself, a French edition of Peggotty, offered endless vistas of speculation. She could never be induced to venture beyond the appointed boundaries, but perhaps her very conservatism stimulated his imagination. If they had ever penetrated into the Jardin des Plantes instead of gazing at it from afar, his youthful conviction that it was actually the Garden of Eden grown older might possibly have been shattered. Certainly Mélanie's description, unsatisfactory as it was, tallied exactly with the pictures in the family Bible. He was careful not to divulge this startling discovery to his mother or father, because, though he never doubted its accuracy, like many less exceptional children, he dreaded the bludgeon of ridicule that so often descended upon his head.

The abnormally sensitive boy even when buttressed by a sense of humor gets an early insight into the tortures of the damned. School exposed Pierre Nozière to the cruel assaults of ridicule, even more than home. He hated the

teachers, the method of instruction, and most of his companions. His mother held that unswerving belief in the virtue of letters which occasionally comes to those who have been denied educational advantages. If only her son could master the bewildering complexities of the "participe passé" she was certain he would go far in the world. But Pierre was true to the tradition so eagerly cited by scholastic failures that the highest peaks of worldly fame are rarely scaled by the men who carried off the prizes at school. He was one of those imaginative children who can never capitalize their intellectual assets in class. From the very first he revolted against the pedantry of his instructors. No doubt they were quite incapable of coping with his quicksilver mind, but could any man have taught Anatole France? Surely he was born to harass the teaching profession by his resolute antipathy to the most elastic discipline.

There were other reasons for his dislike of school. At no time of life, either as a child or as a man, has he ever regarded the principle of competition except as a snare of the Evil One. We can sense the future communist in his bitter arraignment of all rivalry among schoolboys.

The dirt and smell also offended him. Indeed, if M. France is to be taken literally, there was not much to choose between the average school in France during the Second Empire and the polite academy in Yorkshire of a slightly earlier date presided over by Mr. Squeers.

The boy who translates his reading into life too literally invariably paves the way for his own disillusionment. If we are to preserve our equanimity at all we must admit the border-line between books and life. Most children bridge the gap unconsciously, but Anatole France could not accept the humdrum milieu in which he found himself without a struggle. His mother regaled him with the lives of the saints, and immediately he wanted to become a saint himself. To emulate St. Simeon Stylites by camping out on the top of the chimney seemed innocent enough, but the effort met with no encouragement from his family. The sudden decision to give all to the poor by the simple expedient of throwing his toys out of the window irritated his father to such an extent that in despair he decided to become a hermit. Once more he fell foul of his family, who began to weary of his terrible literalness. While these

adventures would have left no permanent impression upon the average boy, in the fertile imagination of Anatole France they sowed the seeds of scepticism. As a child he wanted to become a saint or a soldier. These careers alone provided an avenue to fame and an escape from the anguish of doubt, but they were both closed to him by the mockery of his parents. During his childhood the streets of Paris were still full of Napoleon's veterans and there was probably not a boy of his age who had not fought the battle of Waterloo over again on the knee of an old "grognard." His Uncle Hyacinthe, who by his own account had been decorated for valor by Napoleon himself, was just the man to fascinate a boy's imagination. Actually, this attractive old ruffian lived a hand-to-mouth existence in disreputable cafés, but at six years old the moral sense is still undeveloped, and le petit Pierre admired his uncle passionately. Eventually his enthusiasm waned and he transferred his hero-worship to a bibliophile who spent his life cataloguing other people's books and bric-à-brac.

To follow Anatole France systematically step by step through his childhood would be an im-

possible task, nor was his autobiography ever intended for that purpose. He is always diverging from the path of fact into the pleasant jungle of reflection. And yet these volumes of reminiscence, formless as they are, recapture the mind of a child with uncanny precision. For the reader who turns to French literature for the spacious pleasures of harmony and design Anatole France will always be a disappointment. We like him for the play of his fancy. More than that, we like him because he responds to a stimulus in which we can still sympathize. While most boys only develop through contact with companions of the same age, he was stoking the fires of youth with the unending pageantry of the streets of Paris. Even Paris would have been insufficient without the galaxy of cronies that frequented his father's bookshop. There was the delightful M. Dubois, who shocked his mother by encouraging him to neglect his studies; M. Ribert, the romantic, who had anchored in 1830 and could never believe that the argosies of literature had sailed past him; and, most picturesque of all, his godfather, M. Danquin. These characters steal in and out of the autobiography so unobtrusively that

it is not until we have laid down *La Vie en Fleur* that we realize how attached to them we have become. No wonder le petit Pierre was fascinated by their conversation. Even if M. France has seasoned their remarks with his own wit, we are still satisfied that the bons bourgeois who foregathered with M. Thibault were very delightful people. Danquin, the epicure, who devoted his life to paleontology, the delights of the table, and the Napoleonic legend, is just one of those minor characters whom Dickens thrusts into his novels and who promptly achieve immortality. Like all Anatole France's creatures, M. Danquin rides his master's hobby-horses. Dickens allows his characters to develop their own idiosyncrasies, but your M. Bergeret, your Abbé Coignard, your insignificant Danquin never taste this freedom. We do not regret it, for Anatole France's hobby-horses always travel at a tremendous rate. Moreover, they carry striking colors and we can recognize them at any distance. Dubois and Danquin start an innocent discussion about Napoleon, but almost before they are under way M. France has dexterously snatched the subject away from them and is off full tilt on the futility of military conquest.

Anatole France's views on militarism, clericalism, and royalism are so well known that we would confine ourselves for the present to the more delicate flowers of his fancy. These grow so abundantly that we can pluck at random and never fail to bring home something rare. The pensée is a genre of literature of which the French have always possessed the exclusive secret. Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, Vauvenargues, Joubert — the list is too long to enumerate. Anatole France is the Benjamin of this family. Occasionally, as in the *Pensées de Riquet* in the Crainquebille volume, he deliberately isolates a series of unrelated thoughts, but more often his aphorisms are woven into the texture of reminiscence and literary criticism. *Le Jardin d'Épicure* and *Les Opinions de Jérôme Coignard* are only held together by a gossamer thread of continuity. Now a collection of pensées, such as either of these last two books, runs the double risk of going aground on the shoals of platitude or drifting on the rocks of repetition. The writer of pensées who would steer his way between these two dangers must know how to reiterate without being wearisome. At the same time he must have accumulated more raw material in the shape of ideas than either the critic or

the essayist. Anatole France has been accused, with some justice, of plagiarizing himself. That is perhaps the most venial fault with which any writer could be charged, but such as it is, we recommend a plead of "guilty." Certain trends of thought recur continually in all his writings. Take, for instance, the phrase "n'espérons pas tout éclaircir." We choose this particular sentiment because it seems to us the very cornerstone of his kindly scepticism. Incidentally, for a man who champions classicism as ardently as Anatole France this plea for illusion is surely a strange battle-cry. He develops the idea more elaborately in the *Jardin d'Épicure*.

"L'ignorance est la condition nécessaire, je ne dis pas du bonheur, mais de l'existence même. Si nous savions tout, nous ne pourrions pas supporter la vie une heure. Les sentiments qui nous la rendent ou douce ou, du moins, tolérable naissent d'un mensonge et se nourrissent d'illusions."

Students of Anatole France will doubtless call to mind many other passages equally illustrative of his sympathy with ignorance, but we will content outselves with one more citation:

"Les vérités découvertes par l'intelligence de-

meurent stériles" (*Les Opinions de Jérôme Coignard*).

We have ventured to call this recognition of the limitations of sheer intellect the cornerstone of Anatole France's scepticism. From this foundation he rears a contempt for the machinery of justice, which casts a shadow across many of his stories. The law is the constant butt of his sarcasm. Its course is so easily deflected by patriotism, racial feeling, or, indeed, by any current prejudice. And M. France, for all his dainty pessimism, feels the injustice of the world bitterly. The Dreyfus case rankled within him so deeply that for ten years it permeated everything he wrote. It is as hard for Anatole France to keep Dreyfus out of his books as it was for poor Mr. Dick to avoid the mention of King Charles's head.

Hatred of injustice and instinctive sympathy with the under dog are not qualities peculiar to Anatole France. What is peculiar is his special blend of sentimentality and cynicism. Though he knows how to excoriate his victims with real gusto it is only occasionally that he chastises with scorpions. More often he wields the gentler lash of irony. The sentimentality of

Anatole France is less immediately apparent than his cynicism, but below the surface the current runs just as strong. His favorite manœuvre is to slash at hypocrisy with one hand and ladle out sentiment with the other. Those two delightful philosophers, M. Bergeret and the Abbé Coignard, never vary from this formula. If we are to believe them the intellect never casts off the slough of selfishness; it is only in the heart that man's godlike nature stands revealed.

In the *Opinions of Jérôme Coignard* M. France remarks, by the way, that but for an unfortunate lack of system the good abbé would have combined the virtues of Epicurus and St. Francis of Assisi, the two best friends that a suffering humanity has as yet encountered. The choice of this particular philosopher and saint is not haphazard, for they typify the aspects of paganism and Christianity that Anatole France has always valued most highly. Their contribution to mankind was essentially one of sympathy. The word genius lends itself to epigrammatic definition, but for the moment let us accept Anatole France's dictum that sympathy is the essence of all genius. No man has ever struggled

more consistently to infuse the glow of sympathy into his writings. It is the fashion in the intellectual world of Paris to-day to accuse him of going round and round in the same cage. The enthusiastic stranger finds himself cheering in an otherwise silent house. He may have discovered already that M. France travels intellectually without arriving, that his characters are only reproductions of himself in various settings, but what hurts is to be told that he is actually unintelligent. The world must indeed be topsy-turvy if Anatole France can be summarily dismissed as an old "bavard." If the young literati flatter themselves that they have gone beyond him, it is because his faculty of easy-going æstheticism no longer commands a hearing. By the constant effort to quicken his philosophy with the touch of omniscient understanding he has irritated many of his former admirers. Perhaps he has been doing business at the same stand a little too long. The kindly scepticism which still fascinates us may have begun to pall upon his older friends. After all, sympathy though it be all-embracing cannot by itself hold the world spellbound. We are not concerned for the moment with Anatole France's political

opinions, but even on his own ground of æstheticism there are limits to his universality. His comment on the theatre, for instance, illustrates the dangers of his conception of criticism as the adventures of the soul among masterpieces.

Paul Gsell, who in his interesting *Propos d'Anatole France* has played the part of Boswell to Anatole France's rather over-eager Johnson, frankly records the master's contempt for the drama as a form of literature. "Au théâtre toute nuance est perdue," he exclaims, and he goes on to maintain that half of every play could well be omitted but for the rhetorical effect. And again in *Le Jardin d'Épicure:* "Le théâtre fait tout voir et dispense de rien imaginer." No doubt this is true for a man of his temperament who demands of literature the prolongation of his own ideas, but there is a whole world whose imagination may be stimulated in a different way, who like to be transported by the theatre completely out of themselves. If we would find another blind spot in Anatole France's intellectual vision, we need only test him with religion. Liturgy, the trappings of the church, fall well within his range. He apprehends the external beauty of the Roman faith, everything sug-

gested by the untranslatable word "volupté," as readily as the latest convert. As soon as we penetrate beyond the outworks of religion, however, Anatole France drops behind. We do not complain of his lack of faith. Renan was no more capable of accepting the doctrines of orthodox Catholicism, but Renan never forgot the driving force of religious aspiration. Even if he could not find his own place in the ranks of religion, he realized that he was the exception and not the rule. With the tentacles of his sympathy extending in every direction, Anatole France has yet allowed the greatest single factor in the world's history to elude his grasp.

If we could only persuade ourselves that this amazing man was completely pagan in his philosophy, or that he was a strayed reveller from the eighteenth century, or a devoted henchman of Victor Hugo, we might apply ourselves to the task of analyzing his ideas with more conviction. Unfortunately we cannot fit him into any of the well-worn moulds. At the day of judgment Lorenzo the Magnificent, Voltaire, and Théophile Gautier, to say nothing of Karl Marx, will make a simultaneous rush to welcome a kindred spirit, and each will be perfectly right. The

well-rounded estimate of Anatole France must await a critic of encyclopædic knowledge and extraordinarily sensitive perceptions. He will have to be something of a poet, a satirist, a historian, and a novelist. In the meantime we would only pick up a few strands of thought that he has been trailing in his wake continuously for over fifty years.

The semi-fictional volumes of reminiscence illumine the mind of the man just as clearly as they do the life of the child. In vain he assures us of the utter fallacy of the Greek "Know thyself." He would have us believe that he has casually glanced back at his childhood from a comfortable distance of years and that he has recorded the results of his investigation with perfect detachment. This is not quite true. Anatole France has studied his own mind with infinite patience, and he has insinuated himself into our affections by allowing us a share in all his prejudices and enthusiasms. Other thinkers have been more profound or more original, but none have capitalized their own personality so effectively. His literary criticism reveals him just as candidly as the books on his childhood or his collections of pensées. Like so much of the

best French criticism, the essays of *La Vie Littéraire* were originally written for *Le Temps*. They are shorter than Sainte-Beuve's *Causeries*, also, of course, newspaper articles, and more deliberately impressionistic. We need go no farther than the first essay of Volume I to find an example of the critic ousting his subject in favor of himself. M. France is reviewing a performance of *Hamlet* at the Comédie-Française. As we have already noticed, drama per se leaves him completely unmoved if not actually antagonistic, but the character of Hamlet rouses his best vein of sympathetic criticism. As he warms to his work he suddenly exclaims: "Il pense tour à tour comme un moine du moyen age et comme un savant de la Renaissance." Almost any theory of Hamlet's character can be defended, but we submit that that particular statement is far more applicable to Anatole France than to the melancholy Dane.

The article celebrating the admission of Leconte de Lisle to the Academy contains the thesis of all his criticism. Confronted by a man who stands for the exclusion of personality from poetry, Anatole France promptly runs up his own colors: "on ne sort jamais de soi-même."

Since the publication of his study of Alfred de Vigny in 1868, M. France has not bothered overmuch about consistency. He has sailed under so many flags that we should hesitate to assign him any definite colors except in the realm of æsthetics. In *La Vie Littéraire*, however, he never swerves from the canons of individual taste. His slogan hardly differs from the truculent cry we hear so often: "I may not know much, but anyway I know what I like." M. France happens to know a great deal about literature, but he doubts the value of his own or anybody else's knowledge. Whether a poem is good or bad makes no difference, indeed, he shrinks from the very idea of estimating literature. For him there is only one valid question — do we enjoy it? Nothing else matters. The controversy between authoritative and impressionistic criticism has lasted so long that only a few enthusiasts still follow the game, but as played by Brunetière and Anatole France at the end of the last century it was well worth the price of admission. Brunetière was bound to prove that the theory of evolution embraced literary criticism. He accused Jules Lemaître and Anatole France, among others, of weltering in

their own feelings instead of helping to map out the course of French literature. Anatole France's answer should serve as a model of suavity in literary argument for future generations. No doubt he had left undone the things he ought to have done. He admired M. Brunetière's rigorous method, but might there not be another way of practising the art of criticism? Must the critic be eternally setting the table for others and never relishing the feast himself?

It follows from his excessive cult of pleasure and beauty that Anatole France should scorn the technique of literary construction. As a boy he resented the use of a grammar, he lumped all schoolmasters together as pedants, and displayed a capacity for resisting instruction that quite bewildered his poor mother. Whatever he learned he taught himself. His mind has always been a crucible, even at the age when it was rather expected to be a storehouse. Now, the man who transmutes everything he reads into his own experience derives a rarer pleasure from books than the mere glutton who reads to pass the time. Certain ingredients, of course, cannot be transmuted. We like M. France none the less — in fact, we like him rather more — for

his impatience with decadents and symbolists, and for his airy dismissal of all schools and trends in poetry. Joseph Conrad, a great admirer of Anatole France, may well have had *La Vie Littéraire* in mind when he described criticism as "that fine flower of personal expression." The phrase fits *L'Histoire Contemporaine*, M. France's four-volume excursion into satire, equally well. Generally speaking, satire loses its tang all too quickly. Even Mr. Bernard Shaw does not travel as well as some of the lighter wines of literature. We can all name certain sprightly essayists whose critical impedimenta include invective, but the twentieth century will hardly tolerate censure without a thick coating of fiction. Our ancestors apparently enjoyed pure flagellation more than we do. M. France, however, belongs to that happy band of best sellers who can afford to ignore literary fashions. His solid block of irony towers above the whimsicalities of other satirists. While his contemporaries poke fun at some petty aspect of provincialism, he hacks at the very roots of church and state.

L'Orme du Mail, the first volume of the series, introduces us to the incomparable M. Bergeret,

philosophizing beneath his favorite elm-tree in the Mall. For all his wit M. Bergeret is a strangely pathetic figure. He would have liked to be free, to live in Paris among his intellectual equals, instead of which a shrewish wife anchored him to the shallow society of a small university town. His position as maître de conférences à la faculté des lettres carried with it a miserable salary and no social or literary prestige. Eventually his wife's unfaithfulness with a favorite pupil offered him legitimate cause for escape, and he migrates triumphantly to the metropolis. Around this rather commonplace story is woven a network of royalist conspiracies and local church politics. No corner of the social fabric eludes M. France's vigilant eye. From the Jewish "préfet," whose wife would batter her way into society at any cost, to the old abbé who stoops at nothing to win the coveted bishopric — the whole pageant of religious and political bureaucracy passes in review before him and is found pitifully wanting. Even Riquet, the dog, ostensibly devoted to M. Bergeret, displays a selfishness that is nearly human. Bergeret, himself, the kindly philosopher, when he finally gets the upper hand, subjects his

wife to the cruellest indignities. It is not for a stranger to pass judgment on the truth of M. France's picture. Like most prolific artists, he yields perhaps too easily to the fascinations of a formula, but the existence of a formula does not necessarily affect the general design. We know his favorite combination of Jewish money and religious prejudice, by means of which the royalists persist in their abortive coups-d'état. We know his alternate digs at the army and the law, and as we come upon them again and again we are continually astounded at his capacity for rephrasing his own ideas. Sketchy as it is, we would not conclude this consideration of Anatole France with too much emphasis on his bitterness. For this reason we have omitted all mention of *L'Ile des Pingouins*, a book more sweeping in its satire than anything we have in English literature. No doubt he is the greatest living satirist and it would be mere folly to ignore his tremendous achievement in that unpopular medium. As a mere adventurer, however, and not a professional critic, we claim the right to walk delicately. We have deliberately picked our way through the pleasant walks of his mind and left to others the broad highways.

Thaïs may outlive *Le Petit Pierre* and *The Life of Joan of Arc* his literary criticism, but the question of comparative excellence is not at issue. The Anatole France whom we have tried to picture is a kindly old gentleman with a strong dash of worldly wisdom and a half-scholarly, half-sentimental love of literature. A far more formidable figure lurks in the background, but we would not care to treat him in quite so cursory a fashion.

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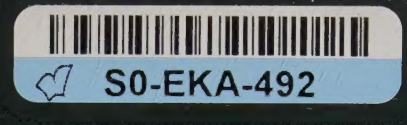
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